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# **THE COMMODITY OF TRADE IN CONTEMPORARY DESIGN**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of Northumbria  
University at Newcastle for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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# ABSTRACT

This research explores the intersection between the design industry and the ubiquitous media and events industry, focusing on the context of design characterized by limited editions and one-off artefacts. The increasingly growing manifestation of this type of design in the media – and the media in design – has an impact on the way certain designers conceive and practice their profession, and on the design industry as a whole. The aim of this PhD is to provide an understanding of such impact. In doing so, this thesis answers the main question:

**What commodities (intended as the ensemble of goods, values, competencies and services) are traded in the contemporary design industry and by whom?**

As a result, this research expands the notion of the design process beyond the artefact, highlighting the role that its representation in the media and events has in the process. Furthermore, this study provides new understanding on the media profile within the design industry. The designers' media profile entails popularity and prestige. It indicates the extent of the audience and the level of status; it is quantity and quality at the same time. To express this with the terminology used in this thesis, a well-constructed media profile infers reputation, besides visibility.

In fact, reputation and visibility emerge as central commodities for trade. As visibility and reputation are the fuel that feeds the contemporary design industry, then the power of the media has proven crucial, allowing a fluidity of roles in the design industry. The research witnesses the way actors conventionally belonging to the media industry are now able to commission new content to feature in their publications and events and monetize from this. The thesis concludes with the observation that some designers are also starting to monetize from their presence in exhibitions, by demanding loan and participation fees. Conclusively, this thesis critically highlights the need to reconsider the roles of each actor involved in the design industry according to the trade of such immaterial commodities.





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# DECLARATION

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others. The word count for this thesis is 83,589 words, as certified by Turnitin.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the University Ethics Committee on March 2012

Name: Giovanni Innella

Signature:

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> January 2014



# GLOSSARY

During the study illustrated in this thesis, two tools have been developed to filter, visualize and analyse data. These two tools, namely the *Process Chart* and *Trade Map*, are described in the Chapter 3, imply the use of certain terms that recur in the thesis. This glossary presents those terms. When the following terms appear in the text they are highlighted using Capital Letters and *italicised* text and they possess the meaning described here in this glossary.

*Media Attention*: the popularity in events and printed or digital media of certain objects or professionals.

*Physical Accessibility*: the possibility of purchasing and buying physical artefacts.

*Process Chart*: a chart illustrating the design process in its five phases: *Commission*, *Design*, *Production*, *Distribution* and *Consumption*. This type of chart acknowledges three kinds of outcomes, the *Piece*, the *Display* and the *Image*.

*Trade Map*: a map where the actors taking part in the trade occurring in the design industry, or more specifically in selected commissions, are listed and categorized. Connections amongst these actors have been made in relation to the commodities they exchanged with one another.

*Designers*: someone who provide design services to a *Commissioner*.

*Commissioners*: someone who approach a *Designer* in order to secure his or her service.

*Clients*: usually someone who sell or borrow the designed artefacts. They can be collectors or museums purchasing the designer's work, galleries distributing the work of the designers, brands who produce and sell the designer's works once these are completed. *Clients* differ from *Commissioners* as they are restricted to those that come in after the commission has been contracted.

*Agents of Media Profile*: They are media representatives or hosts of events. Here we find journalists, editors, critics, events and their organizers.

*Enablers*: They are the ones that back the designers to make the project happen by contributing with technical, economical or creative support. This category includes, sponsors, craftsmen and producers, collaborators of sort. Colloquially they can also be referred to as "backers".

*Other Creatives*: They can be artists or designers involved in the design industry, outside of the selected commissions.

*Schools*: They are educational institutes or organizations in charge of workshops and similar

activities.

*Autonomy*: one's granted independence to decide and act.

*Visibility*: one's prominence to an audience.

*Reputation*: a widespread belief that someone has a particular quality.

*Financial Value*: an economic advantage.

*Personal Reward*: one's satisfaction or gratification on a personal level.

*Piece*: the artefact as an object for use.

*Display*: the exhibition of the artefact.

*Image*: the visual representation of the artefact.

*Commission*: the process phase in which the collaboration and agreements between

*Commissioner* and *Designer* are outlined.

*Design*: the process phase in which plans and decisions about aesthetics, concepts and functions are made.

*Production*: the process phase concerning the making of an outcome.

*Distribution*: the process phase in which an outcome is made available to an audience of beneficiaries.

*Consumption*: the process phase in which an outcome is received and used.

Additionally, recurrent references are made to two desing events, the Salone del Mobile and Design Miami. It is convenient to define them here:

Salone del Mobile: also referred to as the Milan Furniture Fair. It is a furniture fair held annually in Milan, usually in spring for the duration of a week.

Design Miami: an international design show. Design Miami/ is held annually in December in Miami, Florida. Its sister show, Design Miami/Basel, is held annually in June, in Basel, Switzerland.





# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**



# 1.1 RESEARCH INTENT

When asked which of the objects he designed was his favourite, Italian design maestro, Achille Castiglioni responded:

*“The object I'm proudest of? A switch for an electric lead I designed thirty years ago with my brother Pier Giacomo. It was produced in large numbers and bought for its formal qualities, but no one knows who made the design.”*  
(Castiglioni, 2007)

What Castiglioni was talking about can, in a positive sense, be defined as design anonymity and utilitarianism. Navigating through magazines, websites and festivals, anonymity nowadays seems to be the designer's greatest fear; while the designer's relationship with utilitarianism is ambiguous – is it their biggest ambition or their biggest oversight?

Historically, product design has been viewed by the industry and society as a combination of applied art and science brought together to develop products that work on several levels including aesthetic, ergonomic, functional, producible, and marketable. The role of an industrial designer, therefore, is to design and create solutions that maximize the potential utility and commercial success of the product through consideration of its form, usability, marketing, manufacture, and sales amongst other elements (Potter, 1989). From tables to cars, vacuum cleaners to telephones and lamps to lighters, industrial design, in a conventional sense, is concerned with enriching people's lives whilst at the same time designing more functionally robust products, less expensive services, and systems that reduce damage to the environment (Rodgers, 2009). In most cases, the day-to-day work of product design results in the production of physical goods that remain largely outside the world of the media (Munari, 2009). By this, it is intended that the majority of goods produced and used widely are highly tangible. They are real, usable, physical objects but their visibility on the increasingly intrusive and ubiquitous world of the media such as magazines, websites and exhibition events is close to zero.

In recent years, there has been an increasing shift in the power and reach of the media within the design context. This is particularly evident in relation to the design and production of limited editions and one-off design pieces. The design community has witnessed a growing phenomenon in the number of these objects being produced, which have quickly become part of private and public collections. Typically, these goods are traded through auctions or just exhibited in fairs and events, which results in them being inaccessible as usable objects for the primary function they are supposed to perform. Conversely, their popularity in the mediated contexts of events and online or printed magazines has grown. The presence of design in these contexts and the continuous growth of design events and media hint at a complex industry that functions according to different criteria than the ones of the traditional product design industry (Innella et al., 2012). Such a shift has cemented design as part of our

visual culture, thus allowing design to enter directly the cultural industry before even passing through the production industry (Franzato, 2011; Sparke, 2004). The designs we admire in the exhibitions and media are cultural products; they are the result of a process and part of a trade. The goal of this thesis is to learn more about both the process and the trade behind these products.

This research explores the intersection between the design industry and the ubiquitous media and events industry. The increasingly growing manifestation of design in the media – and the media in design – has an impact on the way designers conceive and practice their profession, and on the design industry as a whole. This thesis observes the way designers and commissioners exploit their presence in mediated contexts, thus defining the current model for design and the occurring trade within it.

# 1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIMS

The goal of this PhD dissertation is to provide an understanding of the impact the media has on the contemporary design industry. This includes the way designers conceive and practice their profession and what other actors are involved in the design industry and their roles.

More precisely, this thesis proposes the main question:

**What commodities (intended as the ensemble of goods, values, competencies and services) are traded in the contemporary design industry and by whom?**

In order to find answers to the main research questions, this research examines the following research aims:

**A. To identify the relevant actors and their roles in the contemporary design industry.**

- To describe the network of professionals the designer interacts with during the design process and the trade of the designed goods.

**B. To understand how the designer's and commissioner's media profile have an impact on their role in the design industry**

- To define what constitutes a media profile and its cultural implications.
- To discover if commissioners adopt the designer's media profile as a criterion for their selection.
- To observe if and how a designer considers the client's media profile and how this is taken into account when agreements are made
- To understand what values and meanings are associated to the designers and the clients through their media profile.

**C. To understand what else a designer can trade, apart from the design of the artefacts and if this represents a new model for design.**

- To provide a description of what activities a designer has to undertake in order to make the commissioned work circulate through media.
- To interpret those activities as part of a new design model.
- To identify the advantages and disadvantages for both commissioner and designer in the diffusion of the commissioned work through media.
- To understand what are the tacit and explicit agreements concerning the circulation of the artefact before, during and after the commission is undertaken.

## 1.1 RESEARCH FOCUS AND CONTEXT

The increasing visibility of these designed artefacts in our media-driven modern culture have at the same time led to the abandonment and loss of the designed artefacts' function of use (Sudjic, 2009). That is, the main function now appears to be the representation of such goods and the media profile of their creators (Long, 2006). The industry that has flourished around the representation of design has played an important role in increasing the presence of design artefacts in printed and new media, Internet websites, and the exhibitions of design objects during design festivals and events (van Kester 2010).

This type of design has been sometimes defined as DesignArt (Coles, 2005, 2010; Hage and Ryan, 2008). The term DesignArt is ambiguous and therefore of little help to identify the context of this research. The next sub-sections help to clarifying this ambiguity and better define the scope of this study.

### 1.1.1 A COMMON GROUND FOR ART AND DESIGN

The term DesignArt comes from the realm of art, as it first appeared in an article written by artist Joe Scanlan, where he defines it as:

*"Any artwork that attempts to play with the place, function and style of art by commingling it with architecture, furniture and graphic design"*  
(Scanlan and Jackson, 2001: 26)

This definition depicts art that have the appearance of functional objects. Yet the functional features of those artefacts are meant more as a communication tool than as a real purpose to perform.

Critics coming from the art world have initially treated this context of design by unintentionally suggesting that only artists could descend into the realm of design (Antonelli in Greff et al., 2007), while the opposite seemed not to be allowed. Apart from Pardo's and Oldenburg's interiors (Coles, 2005) - which use design as a mean for artistic dialogues -Judd's self-produced furniture (Murayama, 2011), Van Lieshout's seats for Dutch brand Lensvelt B.V. (Atelier van Lieshout and Allen, 2007), and also the most recent Anish Kapoor's questionable incursions into architecture (Glancey, 2010) prove that such a passage is welcomed by the design industry.

But the permeability allowed by the ambiguous context of DesignArt is not unilateral as the art world suggests (Antonelli, 2007; Howard, 2004). Also designers can access it, blurring even more its boundaries. In fact, most discussions that attempt to trace a clear line between design and art tend to get stuck on sterile discussions that simplistically confine design in its function of use (Judd, 1993; Potter, 1989: 9–15). Designers are proven not to accept such a rigid limitation by accessing the art contexts with pieces infused with conceptual meanings. For example, critic Deyan Sudjic described designer Ron Arad as an artist who uses design as a subject (Poynor, 2005), thus contributing to doubts rather than clarifying where the separation between design and art lies. The two realms of design and art have more recently shown overlapping traits, like production methods, aesthetics (Lupo 2011) and now also in the way the artefacts are traded through auctions and galleries. To objectively identify what in DesignArt can be labeled as design and what instead can carry the art label is hard, if not impossible. Nevertheless, not even the stubborn bureaucracy of customs policy is able to label consistently as art or design the same item (Beta Tank 2011), as if also from a legal perspective a separation between the two cannot be detected, and may not exist. In a short time, the adoption of the term DesignArt by auction houses (Phillips de Pury & Company, 2006) made it become an epithet for limited edition sales. The speculative connotation of DesignArt has rendered it a term critics and insiders deem reprehensible enough to disassociate from and purge themselves to be rid of it (Coles, 2007: 11; Rawsthorn, 2007).

### 1.1.1 A FRAMEWORK TO OVERTAKE THE AMBIGUITY OF DESIGNART

As a term, DesignArt is ambiguous and certainly unyielding in demarcating the two realms of art and design. Indeed, the purpose of the term DesignArt is to blur the two realms, identifying a common space, where authors from the two disciplines can produce and trade their physical artefacts.

Trying to define this context in terms of conceptual depth or technical experimentation is complex, subjective and therefore arguable. Instead, observing the discrepancy between the *Physical Accessibility* of the objects and their estimated *Media Attention* can facilitate in identifying this niche of design. In fact, the limited accessibility opposed to the notoriety on media and exhibitions is a common characteristic of the artefacts populating this realm of design.

In order to avoid the ambiguity of the term DesignArt, an alternative way to define this context of design has been developed and presented here. For better clarity, a visual framework reflective of design can be developed. In it, the relationship between the *Physical Accessibility* of selected designed objects and their visibility in media are reflected in the



horizontal and vertical axes respectively. *Physical Accessibility* is mainly determined by the number of copies in circulation and in actual use by users. The contexts for physical access are users' homes and shops where a more tangible experience of use of the object is permitted. *Media Attention*, on the other hand, is represented by the presence of certain artefacts as the subject communication through media. Conventionally, exhibitions are also connotative of media (i.e., magazines, books, the internet, etc.), as with other forms of media, exhibitions are contexts for visual consumption. In these contexts, the tangible experience of the displayed objects is denied by systems of rules. Moreover, elements of the surrounding, such as plinths and spotlights, direct focus on the visual experience of the object. The scope of this research is limited to designers currently operating in the upper-left quadrant of the framework (highlighted in Figure 1.01).

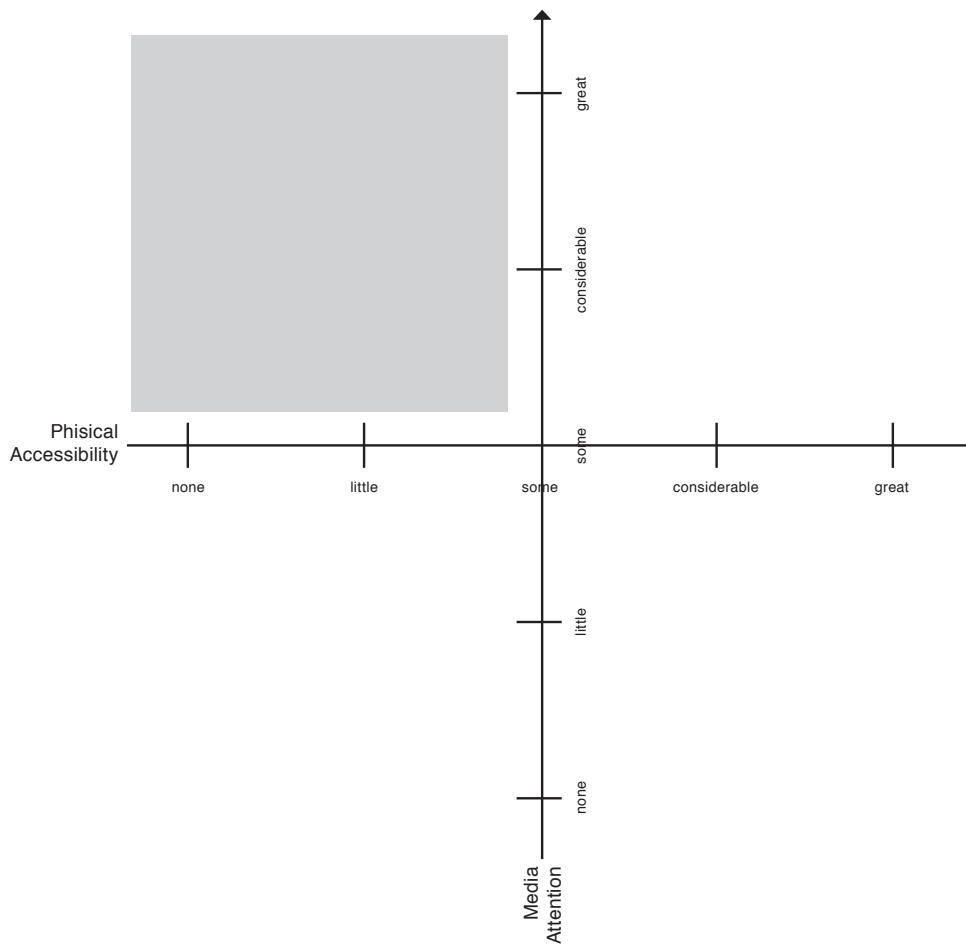


Figure 1.01. Framework Media Attention - Physical Accessibility

So as to better communicate the framework, three representative objects have been selected for each of the four quadrants (Figure 1.02). Thus, in the top-left quadrant we see designed objects produced in very small numbers (Ron Arad's Rover Chair, 1981; Marc Newson's Lockheed Lounge Chair, 1986; Tejo Remy's You can't Lay Down Your Memory chest of drawers, 1991) but represented in substantial numbers across the media. For example, Tejo Remy's "You Can't Lay Down Your Memory" chest of drawers (1991), made from conventional materials such as maple, metal, plastic, burlap and oak, was produced in a limited series of 200 and has been the subject of auction sales all over the world. It is highly unlikely that this particular product will be considered by the broader audience as a chest of drawers where to actually store clothing given that there are only 200 of them in existence and their auction price is in the region of \$30,000 per piece. Similarly, the ten Lockheed Lounge chairs (1986) designed by Marc Newson have all been sold to collectors and museums through auction houses. In 2009, Phillips de Pury & Company in London sold one of Newson's Lockheed Lounge chairs for £1,105,250 setting a record for the highest price paid in history for furniture by a living designer (Phillips de Pury & Company, 2011). Although very few people have had the opportunity of experiencing that object as a chair, meaning actually sitting on it, its representation has reached a very broad audience via magazines, websites, videos and exhibitions. The use of the chair in a popular music video by Madonna allowed its visual representation to extend considerably its audience beyond the circle of design practitioners, educators, students and connoisseurs. While the Lockheed Lounge chair remains a very exclusive object, its representation is consumed globally, broadly distributed whilst consumed only on a visual level (DuGay, 1997).

Conversely, in the bottom-right quadrant we find a range of objects that are manufactured in their millions (Yale Padlock, 1948; GEM Paperclip, 1899; wooden pencil with eraser, 1858), but remain outside the focus of media attention. In the top-right quadrant we include objects that reached both a great visibility on media and have been sold in considerable numbers (Earl Dean's Coca Cola bottle, 1915; Philippe Starck's Juicy Salif squeezer, 1988; Richard Sapper's Tizio lamp, 1971). The bottom-left quadrant features objects designed by students, that remain at the stage of unique pieces and that also have never received considerable media attention (Kwak Chul An's Materializing Dematerialization, 2010; Tomm Velthuis' Treintafel 2009; Hans Tan's Bamboo Chaise, 2005).

Obviously such a framework is not based on hard data, and therefore it presents a level of subjectivity. If one is not exposed to a certain kind of media, one might not recognize the *Media Attention* given to Marc Newson's Lockheed Lounge Chair. Key factors can be the interests, provenance and profile of the person looking at the framework. A young kid might have never seen the Lockheed Lounge Chair published on magazines, for example. However, allowed some tolerance and common sense, the suggested framework is acceptable, at least within the design community (Innella et al., 2011)

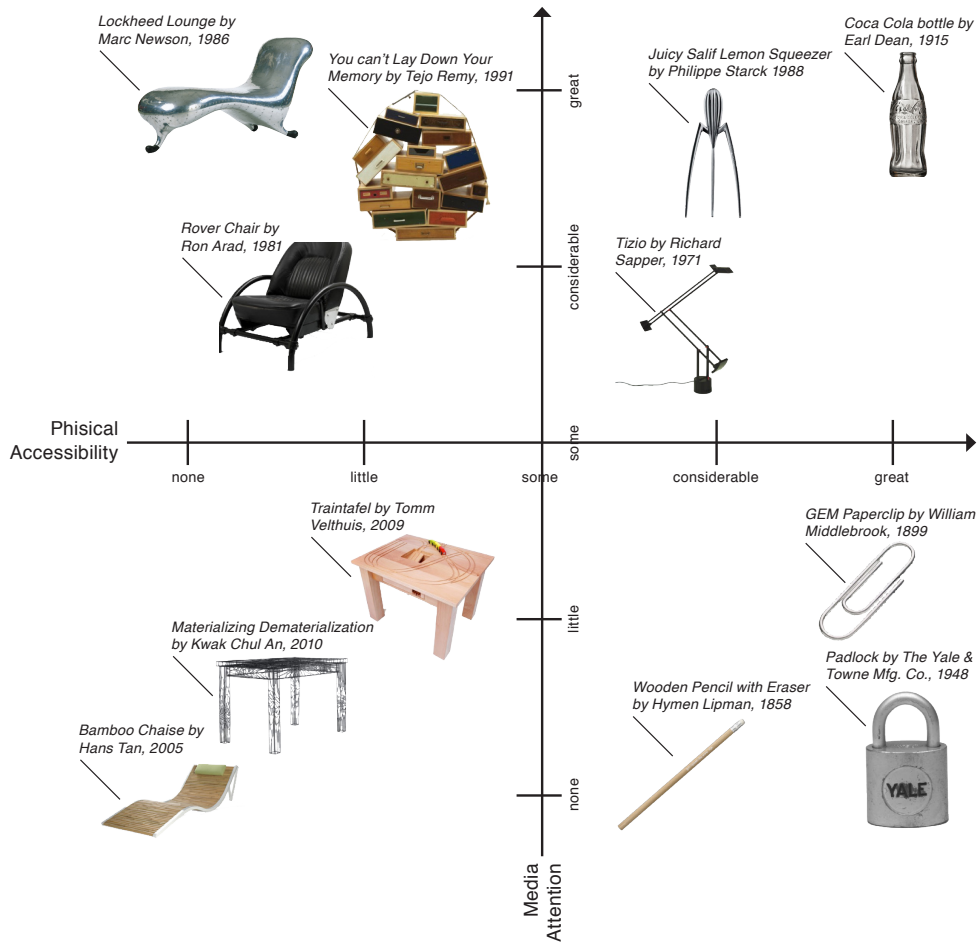


Figure 1.02. Framework Media Attention - Physical Accessibility with illustrative design objects

The described framework helps in organizing the immense world of design in relation to its presence on the media. Although here the framework is applied only to product design, as that is the focus of this research, it could also be adapted to other design industries, such as fashion and car design. This research is mainly focused on what happens in the first quadrant, the one characterized by low *Physical Accessibility* and high *Media Attention*. This type of design is increasingly growing in size and relevance and so do the myriads of design events around the world and the design websites on the Internet. Graduates from leading European design schools – such as the Royal College of Art of London or the Design Academy of Eindhoven – often make their debut in the design industry with projects ascribable to the first quadrant of the framework and increasingly operate in this context of design. Their works are exhibited regularly during the numerous design festivals and published on design media.

### 1.3.3 WHY IS THIS CONTEXT IMPORTANT?

Designer and ex-teacher at the Royal College of Art of London, Sam Hecht observed that the works displayed during the yearly Salone del Mobile of Milan represent about 1.6% of what people use (Hecht, 2010). Nevertheless, it has been observed that the design consumed on media and exhibitions is for students influential to their motivation in pursuing a design career, and also provides the momentum for students to study design at University (Innella et al., 2011). This niche of design has, therefore, a very high influence on the future generations of designers and on the way they conceive of design.

The impact of the design populating the quadrant characterized by low *Physical Accessibility* and high *Media Attention* has important influence also on the more accessible design. Design critic Louise Schouwenberg in a recent article published on Domus under the noteworthy title “Why Design doesn’t Need to Perform” (Schouwenberg 2013) points out the fact that designers traditionally operating in this context for design (i.e., Hella Jongerius and Jurgen Bey) lead changes in the industry on crucial issues such as sustainability, globalization and identity.

This context of design is therefore important and somehow representative of the contemporary design industry. The relevance and growth of the context of design with high visibility on the media has led us to focus on such a context.

In order to understand the design industry it is necessary to observe the economic and political context it developed in. Design certainly plays a role in enabling the change, but it also responds to the changes in our societies, as it interprets and delivers according to the cultural, social and economic fabric that surrounds it. We live in a time where the growth of the media has impacted every aspect of our lives. From sports to politics, arts and private life, the media have changed the way we live, think and behave (Bauman, 2000). It is therefore legitimate to think that the media’s influence has had an impact on the design industry and the way design is conceived. In 2010 designer Sam Hecht resigned from his position of head of department at the Royal College of Art, London. He explained that his students were “*designing with the media in mind*” (Hecht, 2010). He concluded his talk pointing out that in the 50s designers used to design for the society, in the 70s for the industry; in 2000s they design for the media. This is an industry that we do not know well. We – as designers – do not know what principles rule the industry generated by the intersection of product design and the mediated contexts, including events and festivals.

This thesis tries to increase and improve the knowledge and understanding on these matters. Design is highly influenced by the cultural, technological and economic context that produces it. Now that the association of design with the media has become inescapable, understanding

what is being traded in the design industry means better comprehending what aspects are more valued within the design community. Thus including, what skills and competences rule the design industry; what strategies lead designers, commissioners and other professionals in making their decisions. Ultimately, by studying the design industry in relation to its media presence, the purpose of this research is to better understand contemporary design.

## 1.4 MOTIVATION

As with most research, this study started long before committing to a PhD. When I graduated from the Design Academy of Eindhoven in 2008, I realized that the industry I was projected into was very different from the one described to me during my industrial design bachelor at Politecnico di Torino. Entering the Design Academy of Eindhoven opened the doors of a fascinating world where fresh young graduates could have their space in magazines and exhibitions, where notoriety was rapidly gained – and rapidly lost too. It would be an exaggeration to say that I was a part of that world. I was not, and neither felt that I was. However, I was close enough to it to be included and so I considered myself an insider. As an insider I could witness mechanisms different from the ones I had been accustomed to. I realized that magazines, blogs and exhibitions were necessary contexts to facilitate progress with my career. It was not too hard to get there. However, some necessary activities were required. Photo shootings, the preparation of press releases, loan contracts and so on, were all operations I was not trained for. While curators, journalists and bloggers of sorts all urged me to send high-resolution images, or pack and ship my projects; none of them was willing to pay for my work. I had then realized that the industry I was getting myself into, worked on different principles and criteria than the traditional one of design. Ostensibly, in this niche of the design industry, the volumes of sales were no longer the criteria for granting credibility to designers, but rather the amount of publications and exhibitions was the most used to value a designer. The websites of colleague designers started getting filled with notes of participations in exhibitions and publications. Apparently, those were starting to become the measure for quality and success. In the meantime it was evident that the projects had very limited economy or no economy at all as products, which was striking, considering that in most cases they were pieces of furniture or household items. The proliferation of events and the growth of design in the media – and the media in design – has had an impact on the design industry in such a way that I could not fully understand. This study started with the genuine desire to understand what the current design industry is about. As a designer, I wanted to understand the industry where I would employ my expertise.

### 1.4.1 POSITIONALITY OF THE RESEARCHER

During my studies at the Design Academy of Eindhoven I had a first hand encounter with a specific part of design that had inspired my thoughts and curiosity through the media and the design festivals. This included the organization of photo-shoots, the preparation and distribution of press releases, the management of shipping and loans for exhibitions were all phases streamlined with the design process and crucial for the development of a young designer's career. Now I could see – although not fully understand – a different way of evaluating people, works and opportunities. Obviously, I wanted to know more, to understand

and finally inform the people operating in such a context about its reasoning, its economy and its invisible functioning.

By deciding to make that context the subject of my PhD, I also decided to distance myself from it again, so to re-gain objectivity and independence. While focusing on my doctoral research, there were no streams that linked me to that context and to the people that populate it, apart from the esteem that I genuinely have for some of them and the cordiality we established with each other. The brief experience I gained while in The Netherlands shaped my motivations and helped me to identify the focus of my research, its aims and its objectives.

## 1.5 RESEARCH AUDIENCE

Although the motivation that pushed me to start this doctoral research is derived from personal experience, the question that the research tries to answer is broad and relevant enough to be of interest for a larger audience.

This thesis is intended to reach design theorists and design historians. The described results provide a fertile ground for further research expanding the existing knowledge on the design process and practice. The literature review contained in this thesis can be of significance for design historians, as it draws a concise trajectory starting from previous significant changes in the design industry, laying the basis for understanding the current state of design.

For design students, this research can be helpful in understanding numerous aspects of their future career, such as the effect of engaging with the media, investing in communication and promotion activities and so on. Consequently, this study can be inspiring for educators in the design field to train their students to the current design industry in the best way possible.

Ultimately, this thesis should reach the actors taking part in the design industry and its intersection with the media industry. Thus including design practitioners, curators, editors, gallery directors, event organizers, etc. The fact that the study relates to all these characters and their roles should be a good reason for them to find this work worth reading. For all these professionals a better understanding of the industry they are involved in should allow them to know more about the impact of their decisions within the design community and its development. I hope this thesis can help in fostering their professional consciousness.



## 1.6 CONTRIBUTION TO NEW KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

This PhD thesis represents an original contribution, thus adding new knowledge and understanding. In terms of methodology, the study adopts new tools for data analysis and display that have been conceived specifically for this research and are described at length in Chapter 3. The answers provided to the research aims and to the research question represent a contribution to the knowledge about the design process, the trade and the networks in the contemporary design industry characterized by low *Physical Accessibility* and high *Media Attention*. The new knowledge and understanding that this thesis adds can be summarized with the following outputs:

- A new understanding on the trade in the contemporary design industry including the key actors
- A new understanding of the media profile in design
- A new understanding of the design process
- Two new tools for observing the design process and the trade occurring amongst the actors involved.

Further information about these outputs is to be found in Chapter 6 of the thesis.

# 1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THIS THESIS

This thesis is organized in the following way:

## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

The Introduction describes the research intent, its aims and objectives, as well as its focus and audience. Besides, the motivations for this research are also included here.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

The Literature Review provides a background in the historic and cultural context, thus describing how the design industry evolved to its current state. Later in the chapter, a review of a few selected design works that help frame the context of this research is included.

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

The Methodology chapter relates about the methods and techniques adopted to design and execute the main study. The preliminary studies are also described here as well as their results and how they have informed the methodology for the main study.

## **Chapter 4 – Case Studies**

The data and information resulting from the six case studies are displayed here. Each case study is presented individually, with the visuals and text that derived from each of them.

## **Chapter 5 – Findings**

The chapter covering the Findings brings together the six case studies and draws the meaningful insights about trade and process.

## **Chapter 6 – Conclusions**

The Conclusions further reflect on the insights in order to answer the research aims and the research questions formulated at the beginning of this thesis. The contribution to knowledge that this research makes is found in this chapter. Further, the future works that this research can inform is described in the chapter.



## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**



## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The study of the impact of media in the contemporary design industry is the study of a paradox in which the products of design transcend their physicality in favour of being visually consumed through media and events. The broader task of this research is to unveil how the design industry has evolved in relation to its presence in the media and in the context of our media-driven culture. In order to contextualize this evolution this literature review draws a trajectory in the history of design building a background to the current situation.

The literature review also delves into the realm of cultural studies in order to explain the socio-cultural changes leading to the current society and how our society consumes artefacts and their representations.

Furthermore, this chapter includes a brief review of design works and design critique concerning the way design and media industry interact with each other and how they reach the consumers. This section is helpful in tapping into the discourse on the topic within the design community.

The review is wholly, though not exclusively, informed by three areas: design history, cultural studies and design critique. These contexts provide the necessary broader background for the selected case studies presented in the next chapter and the further discussion included in the conclusion.

## 2.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The role of this section is to highlight selected key events in the evolution of the way design has been represented through festivals and exhibitions. This short historic excursus does not represent a complete history of design events. This selection of key events is functional to build a background to then focus on the current situation in relation to design festivals and events.

### 2.2.1 THE GREAT EXHIBITION 1851 – THE BEGINNING OF DESIGN EVENTS

In 1851 the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations held in Hyde Park, sometimes referred to as the Crystal Palace Exhibition, marked a shift in the way design was proposed to the public. Arguably, the Great Exhibition represents the first large design event in history in which manufacturers, their technologies and creations were at the centre of attention. Conceived as a commercial consortium, the event was intended to show the state of the art in the rampant industrial progress, and expose the audience to new aesthetic forms (Hobhouse, 2004; Zemer Ben-Ari, 2011:6–7). Victorian taste dominated this event, as it was intended to, and its artefacts rapidly spread across the various social classes of the audience. But the Great Exhibition was not only about trade, goods and the proliferation of a Victorian disposition. It was about the building of an experience. Refreshments, music, cafes, a stunning location and a series of services including excursion trains and restrooms provided the backdrop to an unprecedented spectacle. The event set the foundation for a new mode of consuming commodities which Louise Purbrick has described as:

*“a process of looking at representations rather than buying actual objects.”*  
(Purbrick, 2001:15)

The real effect of the Great Exhibition was not one of selling products per se, but introducing the population to a new form of consumption and experience of the artefacts. In such a model the spectacular world of purchase, then represented by the enchanting airy Crystal Palace with all its entertainments and comforts, is well distanced from the one of use, such as the suffocating homes of the Victorian era. The visual consumption of artefacts, as described by Purbrick, would take place at the event, which had an entrance fee generating significant income. Here objects were morphed into representations of themselves; they became props for the event to be consumed visually, before being purchased and brought into people's homes (Figure 2.01) (Auerbach, 1999; Richards, 1991).

However, the impact of this introduction on the media was rather limited considering that at

that time the media as we know it today was in its infancy, restricted largely to text with some illustrations. The technical evolution of the media industry had still to make its course in terms of spread, visual accuracy and appeal, thus limiting the circulation of the representation of design. As a natural consequence the thick official catalogue consisted of a long list of manufacturers with very few illustrations of the artefacts, a practical and technical book for the insiders of that industry, rather than an enjoyable read (Anonymous, 1851). Interestingly, among the artefacts and technologies showcased at such events there were also machines to facilitate and lower the costs of printing processes. Design and its production industry were beginning to foster the progeny for a new upcoming industry – the media industry, which would eventually impact design as much as the industrial production process innovations, transforming products into commodities to print on catalogues and exhibit in showrooms (Bayley and Partington, 1989:45–51).

The Great Exhibition introduced entertainment as an element of support for trade and consumption, giving importance to the visitors' experience of the event. At the same time, the Royal approval of the event would counterbalance the weightless spirit of the spectacle and guarantee the quality of the aesthetics and products on sale. In fact, the Great Exhibition of 1851 took place under the direct approval and support of Prince Albert, thus slathering on a thick layer of credibility to the event and everything that was on display. Monetary prizes and medals bearing the effigy of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria were awarded to producers that met certain standards, resulting in great recognition for those who received them (Figure 2.02) (Baker et al., 1999).



*Figure 2.01. Eugène Louis Lami "Opening of the Great Exhibition, 1 May 1851"*



*Figure 2.02. Prize Medal Awarded during the Great Exhibition, 1851*

The design showcased at the Great Exhibition was conceived within an economy approved and supported by the British Government of the time. Hence, Royal involvement in the planning of the event promoted design within a developing industry, fuelled by a clear political vision. To the general public, designers were anonymous creators of artefacts, devotees of a political and



economic plan, while the producers were worthy of praise from the Royals. However, design started here to make its way as content for an entertaining event that people would pay for.

## 2.2.2 NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR 1939 – CORPORATIONS AS THE REPRESENTATIVES OF A NATION

In 1939, the United States of America at the New York World's Fair presented a similar set-up to the Great Exhibition, in terms of organizational participation of the governmental powers. However, with the slogan "Building the World of Tomorrow", the fair was intended less commercially than the Great Exhibition, in the sense that the fair was not characterized by actual purchase and sale of products and machineries. The New York World's Fair of 1939 was oriented to showcase experimental and futuristic technologies and visions (Figure 2.03).

This time the process of branding was put in action. Differently from the Great Exhibition, the producers were greater and more powerful organizations. On this occasion, the USA presented to the world their largest firms, aided by the growing industrial production that had built internationally known names. The United States were now represented by corporations like Dupont, General Motors, Lucky Strike Cigarettes, AT&T, amongst others. The corporate culture was making its course with the help of leading industrial designers. Amongst them was Raymond Loewy who made his appearance with Chrysler – the American automotive manufacturer (Sparke, 2004).

The American pavilion for the World's Fair of 1939 represented an important shift in the way design events were interpreted; a government now delegated corporations to represent their Country. Within the corporation's work, the designers started gaining prominence. The rise of the designer as a leading actor in public culture was about to become evident thanks to media and events.

## 2.2.3 MEDIA AND DESIGN – THE RISE OF THE CELEBRITY DESIGNER

As the technological progress of the media industry made its course, Western culture started witnessing the rise of the celebrity phenomenon. Soon, stars from the worlds of politics, sport and entertainment began to populate the pages of magazines and newspapers. It was just a matter of time before design and designers would draw the gaze of the media, gaining in popularity and becoming content for it. Through the years, the production and consumption of the celebrity in popular culture has been observed and described by several authors including the likes of Benjamin (2008), Adorno (2001), Debord (1983) and Baudrillard (1975), who all suggest the existence of an economy behind the consumption of culture commodities, ranging from art to politics, from music to products. However, how this model has evolved into the current design industry has yet to be analyzed.

French born and American raised industrial designer Raymond Loewy (1893 – 1986) understood the social and cultural implications of his role, beyond the mere production industry and before most colleagues. Innovatively, he hired a Public-Relations consultant in order to engage with the media industry (Sudjic, 2009a). This spawned another product of mass-consumption when in October 1949 Time Magazine featured his face and his most popular products on its cover (Figure 2.04).

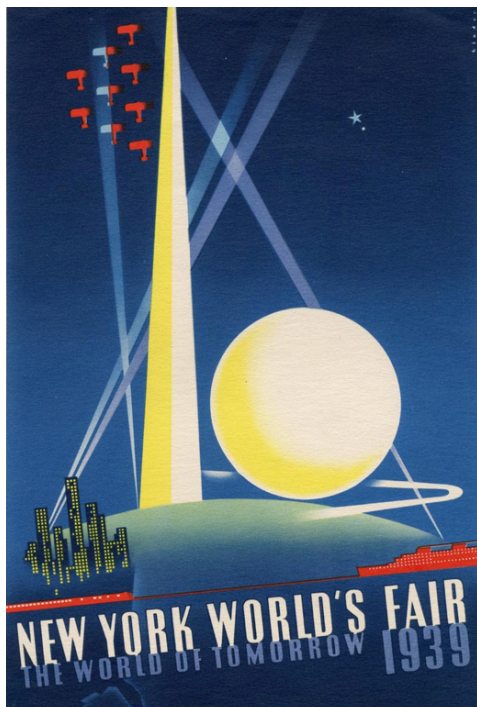


Figure 2.03. A billboard advertising the New York World's Fair, 1939



Figure 2.04. Raymond Loewy on the cover of the Time Magazine, October 1949

Over a decade later, in a somewhat less culturally-engaged manner, the group photo depicting designers George Nelson, Edward Wormley, Eero Saarinen, Harry Bertoia, Charles Eames and Jens Risom posing with their designs on a spread in *Playboy* magazine constituted a further step in the growth of design in the popular media (Figure 2.05) (*Playboy*, 1961). However, the main reason why those designers appealed to the media was because they were successful within the production industry and its driving economy.



*Figure 2.05. George Nelson, Edward Wormley, Eero Saarinen, Harry Bertoia, Charles Eames and Jens Risom Playboy Magazine, July 1961*

It was not only the printed media that evolved and progressed, blurring the separation between commerce and culture. Around the same time, the Useful Objects (1938 – 1949) and Good Design (1950 – 1955) exhibition series contributed to merge the commercial production of the American industry under the blessing of a recognized cultural institution – the Museum of Modern Art in New York. This series of events established a stronger association between commercial and cultural authorities, aiming to support the domestic economy (Staniszewski, 2001: 142–189).

The Useful Objects series of exhibitions was conceived with a clear agenda of informing visitors about affordable quality products. The impact of the exhibition series, in all its annual variations on the commercial sphere, was remarkable to the point that the Useful Objects name became a seal of approval from the private institution MoMA. The Good Design series of products (1950 – 1955), backed by MoMA, led to a range of the products being sold through the Chicago Merchandise Mart. A smaller selection of the same range of products was also

sold at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The support and approval of MoMA led to increased product sales during the exhibition time. Similarly, Good Design became a regular occurrence within MoMA up until its final event in 1955. Today traces of its ethos can still be found in the MoMA stores that opened in the US, Japan and Korea. There, classic furniture and household products can be purchased by anyone with the reassuring endorsement of MoMA. The strategy of exhibiting designed products in a museum had a long lasting impact in the marketing strategies of some brands. Italian kitchen and tableware company Alessi in the 80s had seen its products exhibited in museums, like the Brighton Museum (Lees-Maffei, 2002: 79). By placing its products in such cultural contexts, the brand and its products raised their status to the ones of the museums exhibiting them (Julier, 2008: 78).

With the influential power of the American museum, MoMA, not only transhipped its authority from the confines of the Museum to the shopping malls, but it even succeeded in transcending geographical and political borders. The events Design for Use USA and 50 Years of American Art, which were variations of the Good Design series, held in Europe under the illustrious trademark of MoMA during the cold war years are evidence of such influence. MoMA acted in these situations as an ambassador, a messenger at the service of the U.S. Government and its political and economic agenda. The American government's use of MoMA as an intermediary proved successful, since MoMA represented a comforting entity also for those Countries where a direct involvement of the United States would have awakened the unpleasant memories of the recent war (McDonald, 2004; 2008).

Similar to the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Good Design series in its various manifestations promoted a new aesthetic and the now consolidated industry of mass-production and added an evident national pride. In doing so, it did not use a political figure as a symbol of credibility or commercial firms directly, but instead a cultural institution – MoMA. The designers of those artefacts were regarded as authors worthy of space in a prestigious museum traditionally reserved for art, with their signatures often featured on the designed products. Those designers were pioneers of a new generation of professionals known and respected by the public. This was not only due to the credit given by MoMA, but also to the media industry, which played a crucial role in this shift. Popular magazines like Time and Playboy started bestowing their attention not much on the products or the brands producing them, but on their authors – the designers.

## 2.2.4 THE AMERICAN EXHIBITION IN MOSCOW 1959 – DESIGNERS AS CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES

In 1958, the USSR and USA agreed on an exchange of exhibitions about “*science, technology and culture*” to be held in each other’s countries the following year. Unlike the American pavilion at the World’s Fair of 1939, the USA did not ask any more corporations to provide a representation of the state of the art of the American society. They asked designers; a design couple, Charles and Ray Eames to be more precise. Instead of focusing on products, the couple prepared a pavilion with multiple screens (Colomina, 2001). On these screens scenes and details of the American daily life were projected. The interesting bit of this project, in relation to this research, is that designers were officially recognized as the best interpreters to depict and represent the culture of those days. More importantly, they have done this without showing their products, but simply providing the lens they observed the world with.

Across the Atlantic, in Europe, the design culture was also growing considerably. In Italy the first design magazines were established and started releasing their first issues. Besides *Domus* and *Casabella*, both already established in 1928, the 50s and 60s saw the birth of *Ottagono*, *Abitare*, *Stile Industria*, amongst others (Sparke, 2004: 162). These magazines would depict the past, present and future through the eyes of designers and architects, affirming design as a player in the media industry, beyond the one of products. At the same time, the media industry started to play a role in the design community, unavoidably impacting the design industry as a whole.

## 2.2.5 THE CURRENT SITUATION – DESIGNING FOR THE MEDIA

The industry that has recently flourished around the representation of design has played an important role in increasing the presence of design artefacts in printed and new media, including the exhibition of design objects during design festivals and events.

The attention given to the representation of design has grown considerably in the last ten to fifteen years. The media’s appetite for new content has lead them to voraciously publish press releases mainly coming directly from the designers themselves, along with descriptive reports from design events. The media’s satiation has amplified the reach of the designers and garnered a larger audience. Popular design website, *Designboom.com* has reported the number of monthly readers to be 4.2 million after about ten years of activity (*Designboom*).



com, 2010). One of its competitors launched in November 2006, Dezeen.com, passed from 6 million of yearly visitors in 2008 to almost 12 million for the year 2009 (Dezeen.com, 2010). Design is nowadays also regularly featured in newspapers and lifestyle magazines, becoming a strong part of our visual culture (Sparke, 2004). Data supporting the magnitude of the most recent media growth around design can be found in figures from the Furniture Fair of Milan. Here, the presence of journalists between 1995 and 2010 has increased fourfold, while the number of visitors doubled, reaching the considerable amount of 348,000 in 2008 (Figure 2.06) (COSMIT, 2011). Beside this official fair taking place in one venue located in the outskirt of Milan, a myriad of events are held in more than 600 venues spread across the city (Figure 2.07). Adding the visitors of these events with the ones of the official fair, the total number is more than 500,000 (Balduini et al., 2013). To give a sense of the magnitude of this event, one should consider that it takes the Venice Art Biennale - one of the main cultural events for the Western society - six months to register just 300,000 visitors (British Council, 2009).

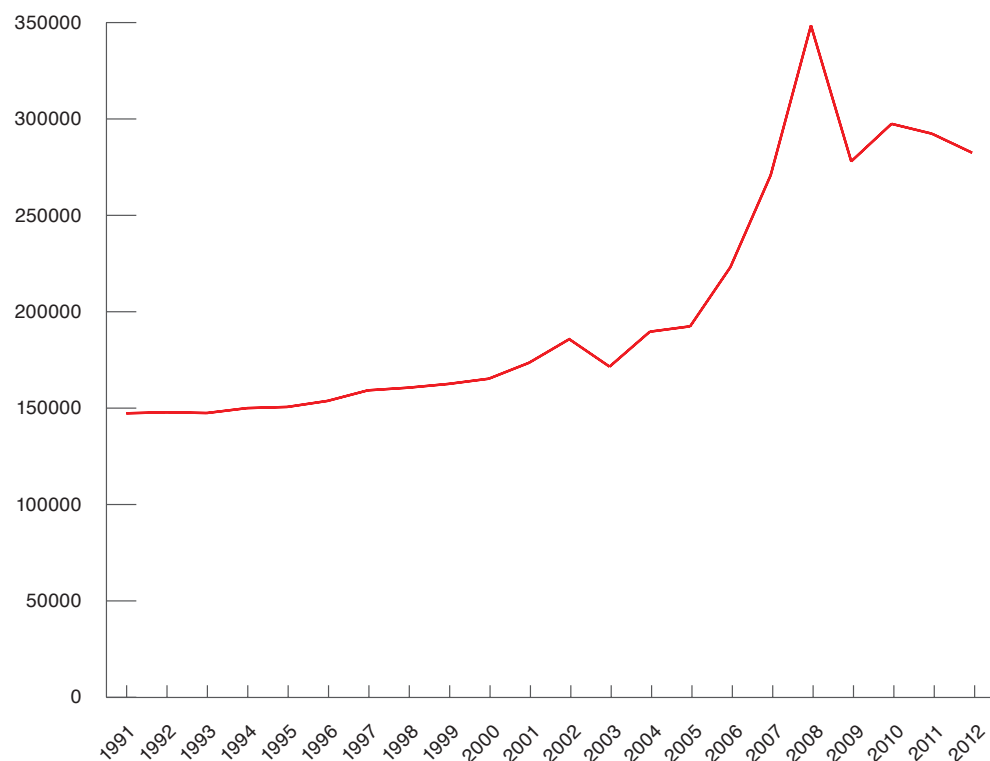


Figure 2.06. Number of visitors (y) attending the Salone del Mobile of Milan each year from 1991 to 2012 (x)

With the duration of a week, the Italian event, in its most recent configuration, features a central venue that showcases commercial brands, a satellite venue for young designers, independent designers and schools, and a mass of collateral events happening in disparate locations within the city of Milan. These events, involve indistinctly established and emergent designers, collectives, schools, brands, design associations and galleries (Fuorisalone.it, 2011).



Figure 2.07. A map of Milan indicating the venues shown in yellow circles during the Salone del Mobile di Milano 2013

The fourfold increase in the number of registered journalists at the Milan Furniture Fair between 1995 and 2010, now counting over 5000 journalists, indicates the growth of the media coverage of international design fairs (Figure 2.08). Therefore to perform well on the media is a necessary strategy for brands, designers and schools taking part in design events. Designers that are successful during an international design event are usually prominent in the media, and so are the sponsors and supporting partners that exhibitors bring along. In the current model for design events, each exhibitor is economically self-supported or sponsored by its own commercial partners. These sponsors can vary from design or art associations (i.e., Arts Council England), museums (i.e., Groninger Museum), commercial brands (i.e., Peugeot) and so on and each of these entities follows its own agenda. As opposite to previous events in design history taken into account in this review - namely the Great Exhibition and the Good Design exhibition series - the current set-up for the main design events today usually does not present a central direction or curatorship by government or public institutions for the entire event. Anybody who can afford a place in the venue or in the town hosting the festival is automatically part of the show, responding solely to his own direction and agenda or the ones of his sponsors. This lack of a central direction has left space for the media representatives to take on the role of guaranteeing credibility and prestige. Consequently, the success of a designer is often represented by the media attention that she or he receives from the design and non-design press (McRobbie, 1998). And currently the long lists of publications and participation in design festivals appearing in the websites of young designers are evidence of this phenomenon (Klamer, 2010).

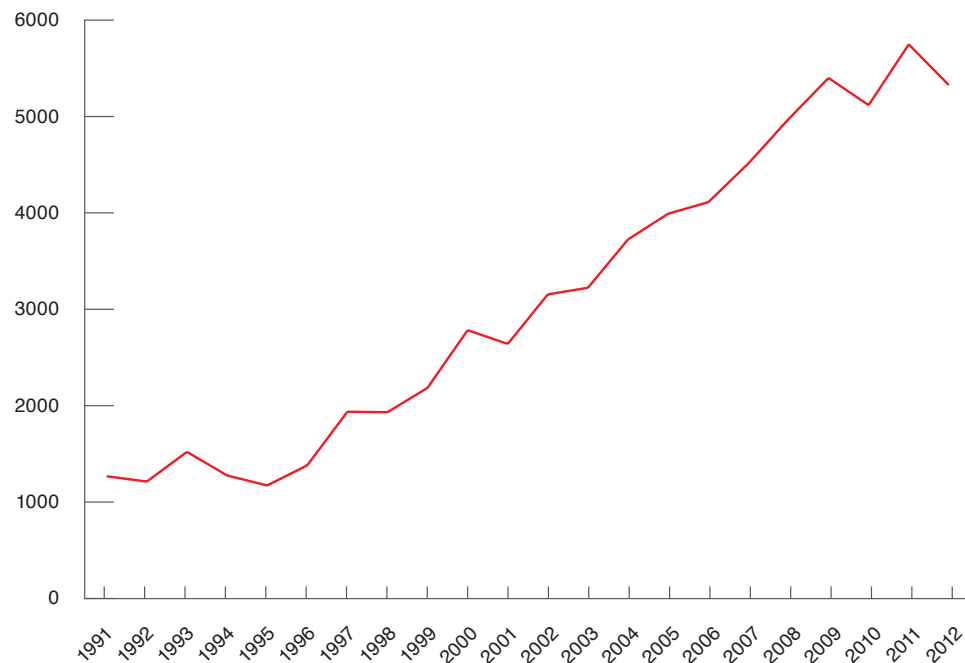


Figure 2.08. Number of journalists (y) attending the Salone del Mobile of Milan each year from 1991 to 2012 (x)

The Salone del Mobile of Milan is only one of the numerous events that fill the calendar of design professionals and aficionados of the Western world (van Kester, 2010). From London to Eindhoven, Paris to Berlin, even extending to Tokyo, New York and Cape Town – just to mention a few – most main cities now host a design festival. The general current model of design festivals reveal a large complex industry in which more than the products what is made visible is the magnitude of design as a marketing tool and the interests of a variety of actors participating in it. The fact that British designer Jasper Morrison provocatively suggests “*Salone del Marketing*”, instead of “*Salone del Mobile*”, as a better name for the Milanese venue, more accurately describes purpose of design events (Rawsthorn, 2012).

The scale and cultural relevance of such events reached the point of impacting the reputation of the hosting cities. Design festivals can in fact improve the cities profiles on aspects like livability, dynamicity and culture, which in our times are important factors for global rankings (Sassen, 2002; Sadini, 2011). Therefore, it can be stated that design, through its representation in a mediated context - such as a festival - has relevance beyond the industry and its closest community (Florida, 2002).

In the mediated contexts of fairs and magazines, a variety of different designs are showcased: from big brands exhibiting their latest commercial collections for the larger market, to designers presenting their prototypes conceived for larger productions and indeed looking for manufacturers and distributors. Brands, manufacturers and distributors represent the common network for a product designer. These actors still populate the design events and media, improving their sales, network, recruitment and promotion (Power and Jansson,



2008). At the same time, design media, including events, allowed a certain niche of design to affirm its existence, building a legitimacy that frees the designers from the constraints of the “factory – supermarket – function of use” sequence and its related design implications. The increasing visibility of these designed artefacts in our media-driven modern culture have at the same time led to the abandonment and loss of function of those artefacts (Toscani, 2011), in favour of conceptual processes or experimentations with materials (Fiell and Fiell, 2007: 6–7), which are then circulated via the media (Franzato, 2011). Through media, the designers have reached the larger audience of viewers, readers and visitors. Noticeably, the design that receives the greatest attention is the one that has detached itself from the real world (Papanek, 2000), taking the semblance of artistic installations instead (Sudjic, 2009b: 141). These works often catch the attention of the media who magnify their spread and the name of their authors (Long, 2006).

The work of the designers operating in this context is usually purchasable in galleries around the globe as well as auctions (Phillips de Pury & Company, 2011). Prices are rarely affordable by the broader audience, and the volumes of sales are very low as are their production quantities. In fact, this is the commercial field of limited editions and one off pieces, where speculation on artificial scarcity is a criterion for market placement and pricing (Lindemann, 2010; Lovell, 2009). The trading system of these goods has specific key figures. Adam Lindemann in his book “Collecting Design” (2010) summarizes these actors in four categories, deliberately excluding the designers. These categories are:

- the collectors,
- the dealers,
- the tastemakers,
- the auction house experts.

Mainly they do what their label suggests. Thus meaning that the collectors are buyers: they commit to purchases after educated research centred on the content of the work, its author and market predictions. Dealers are sellers, but sometimes also commissioners. They possess acute knowledge of the markets and collectors enabling them to occasionally commission designers on specific items or general directions. They also facilitate production to a certain extent, trying to support the designers’ great creative freedom. Some dealers also act as talent scouts (i.e., Murray Moss), as the market of contemporary design is growing (Lindemann, 2010: 52), it is not rare that students’ graduation projects enter this context with relative ease. The tastemakers are advisors for clients and institutions or companies (i.e., Marc Jacobs). They are ambiguous figures, finding their place between the roles of a collector and the one of a dealer. The community regards them as gurus and they can influence the market with their suggestions. Finally auction experts are the ones pricing items and allowing them to enter the bidding system. The contemporary design of exclusive items is slowly entering this context for trading and apart from known and established names like Marc Newson; also young designers’ works are being auctioned now.

The technological progress of the media industry is also significant. In the digital age the representation of design is almost instantaneous in its production, distribution and consumption. The fact that most of those objects will never get past the stage of prototypes is significant in this sense; their economy as real products is trivial for the production industry, while their presence at the events and on the media is highly utilitarian for the media industry.

Through time, many attempts have been made in trying to label this typology of design. Names such as conceptual design (Schouwenberg and Staal, 2008), gallery design, showroom design (Koskinen et al., 2011), author design, DesignArt (Coles, 2005), design art (Scanlan and Jackson, 2001), Design ≠ Art (Howard, 2004), Design-Art (Fiell and Fiell, 2007: 6), design/art (van Cauwelaert et al., 2008), signature design, are not convincing to everyone, although they manage to define this different design ethos to an extent. What characterizes this typology of design is certainly its limited *Physical Accessibility*, as the production is limited to few copies and their prices are often outside the reach of most consumers. On the contrary the visibility gained by these artefacts in the media and exhibitions remains high. This type of design clearly counterpoises itself to the traditional product design logic, transcending the product *Physical Accessibility* and entering directly the world of communication.

## 2.2.6 CONCLUSIONS ON HISTORY OF DESIGN

The trajectory drawn starting from the Great Exhibition and ending with the American exhibition in Moscow, encompasses the rise of the designer as a public figure, able to provide a perspective of the society through his or her creations. Just like the Great Exhibition (1851) and the New York World's Fair (1939), the designs exhibited in the Good Design series were still perfectly integrated with the production industry and supported by the political powers. The Good Design series represented the handing over of the baton of visibility and credibility from the government to other mediating entities, whether these were private cultural institutions or media representatives, like popular magazines. Designers therefore started to be more and more exposed, publicly celebrated as authors of the new aesthetic and recognized as accomplices of the industrious economy. The American exhibition in Moscow in 1959, witnessed the definitive consecration of designers as representatives for popular culture, although still under the direct leadership of a government. For the designer's role, the 1959 Moscow exhibition by the Eames represents an important shift. Designers could now do without corporations and manufacturers. Since then, design and designers have witnessed continued growth in terms of media attention. Furthermore, they developed skills and techniques to communicate and impact society without necessarily passing through mass-production, but by exploiting their presence in media and events. This aspect has had an increasing impact on the industry, thus leading to the current situation.

Compared to the examples in design history previously described, like the Great Exhibition and MoMA's Good Design Series, the current situation denotes a fragmented network that does not feature anymore one defined main representative actor, resulting in great complexity. In this complexity the spectrum of the design field has expanded beyond the mere design and production of products for the mass market. Design has become a new type of language, appealing to the media industry and that in fact has started establishing tight bonds with the world of communication. So while design websites, magazines and events have extended the reach of design allowing it to communicate to a broader audience, the *Physical Accessibility* of design has changed its role confining it to the exclusive contexts of auctions and galleries.

This short summary of selected key events in the history of design has shown a progressive detachment of the designers from the direct influences of governments first and the production industry later. The current design industry appears estranged from central powers. In this context designers operate with increasing autonomy from the traditional market of the consumer products. Their involvement with the media industry has led them to produce works as communication tools directed to an audience of readers of magazines and visitors of exhibitions, rather than users. The penetration of design in the media – and the media in design – has therefore originated a complex industry.

The book “Collecting Design” by Adam Lindemann (2010) depicts the network populating the community of the collectible design works. In fact Lindemann's choice of excluding the designers from the list of interviewees, allows a focus on the industry that spins around those exclusive artefacts. However, in this book, none of the interviewees is clear about what are the terms and conditions with the designers and the nature of the commissions. It is unclear whether the collectors, the dealers or the designers themselves initiate the collaborations or if designers have to rely on their arsenal of self-initiated projects. Therefore, the way independent designers manage and perceive of their practice, how and why they attract the attention of commissioners and what commissioners are looking for when approaching these designers are all aspects that remain uncovered. Furthermore the focus of the book is limited to the economy of the artefacts as commodities of trade, without looking at the broader role of the designer within this economy. It is legitimate to wonder how each of the actors included in the interviews impact the career of the designer beyond the economic exchange involved in the sale and purchase of the artefacts. Lindemann's book also reveals the limit of not going beyond the strict network of characters dealing with the designed pieces. Thus it does not investigate the presence of these artefacts, and consequently of their authors, in the media and exhibitions.

If the trading of the designed artefacts is rather simple to understand, responding to the basic market rule of demand and offer dictated by the artificial scarcity of the limited editions – the economy related to their visibility in the media and exhibitions is more complex. The realm of cultural studies is helpful in understanding the changes in the socio-cultural implications of the current design industry.

## 2.3 SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

This section reviews relevant information from the literature made available by Cultural Studies and Philosophy. In doing so, this review looks into the way culture is circulated through the media and the role of design in this process.

### 2.3.1 THE CULTURAL AND SOCIAL VALUE OF PRODUCTS

The shift from physical to visual through media (Innella et al., 2011) has empowered the designer with another social role, far beyond his or her technical skills. The global circulation of representations emitted straight from the designers through media and exhibitions, allowed them to participate directly in the production of culture, bypassing the compromises of the mass-productions (DuGay, 1997). The way culture is produced and disseminated has long been theorized (Adorno and Bernstein, 2001; Baudrillard, 1975, 1994, 2003). Large corporations and product branding have often been recognized as the spinners and disseminators of culture (DuGay, 1991). Through products and their communication they build webs of shared knowledge and nuances crossing political and geographical boundaries. In these, the life threads of culture are to be found: a mesh of standardized techniques, messages and products, whether tangible or intangible. In these webs, Baudrillard manages to untangle the technical value of products from their cultural value. He consigns a product's technical value to concerns of its function of use and physical features, while its cultural value exemplifies the user's projections of social values, dreams and desires onto the same product. This vision reflects the capitalist principles that use social values to increase desire and ultimately sales and revenues. Karl Marx calls the purchase and sale of such values through products, "commodity fetishism" (Carver, 1975; Marx, 1981). This is a tried and tested system when it comes to the ensemble of product, advertisement and packaging (Wernick, 1991), and that foresees the existence of a mass market.

### 2.3.2 DIGITAL CONSUMPTION

But the mass market does not necessarily imply the distribution of physical goods. In recent connotation, "consumption" has been more and more about intangible goods than physical things. Think of music, TV shows, cinema movies and the whole industry of entertainment, which spins around experience rather than the possession of artefacts. Walter Benjamin anticipates the rise of the digital era we live in. In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (Benjamin, 2008), he raises concerns about the meaning

of replicas in a moment in which technology allowed the perfect reproduction of artefacts. In such a scenario the concept of “original” and “copy” would change their connotations, with an impact that disquiets Walter Benjamin. The rise and spread of photography amplifies these issues, especially in regard to the way people think of artworks, which until then were thought of as extremely hard to replicate artefacts. Photographic images have the power of making us question reality and its uniqueness. Debord (1983) sees images as a “spectacle” that defines the interaction between citizens. For Debord images are “*real things*” able to “*mystify reality*” and create an alternative one. Hal Foster (2003: 197) sees the economic value of this spectacle, stating that images represent a capital. Thus meaning that the popularity of a product, architecture or piece of art through the media determines someone’s earning. Foster is explicit in referring to a certain kind of architecture or architects that design with such principle in mind for the benefit of corporations and institutions (i.e., Frank O. Gehry). Artist Joe Scanlan in his essay “Please, Eat the Daisies” reiterates the same concept:

*“There is a monetary value at which any functional object gets flattened into the world of signs accruing the meaning not of its function but of what that function’s social value has become to represent”* (Scanlan in Coles, 2007: 64)

Remarkably, Scanlan and Foster limit the value of representations to the one of money. Probably it is true that in the long run someone capitalizes in a monetary sense from converting artefacts into images, but the circulation of this in our economies generates more than just pecuniary wealth. Such wealth is represented by more intangible and subjective assets, such as reputation, personal reward or notoriety deriving from the circulation of images (Anderson, 2009).

Media have become not only the channel for distributing artefacts converted into images, but they have also built their own authority assuring credibility and prestige (Melotti, 2006; Pine and Gilmore, 2011). The fact that any medium brings along its own values and authoritativeness is a consolidated theory well expounded by Marshall McLuhan in his book “The Medium is the Message” (2008). In order to understand how much trustworthiness is given to what appears on the media, one could just think of the logo “As seen on TV” affixed on commercial products and now also used as a chain of shops. This logo, quite popular in the USA and recently also in Europe, can be interpreted as the ultimate guarantee of quality and reliability provided by media, to the point that it is the real product resembling its televised representation, not vice versa (Figure 2.09) (Bauman, 2004)! This extreme instance serves as an example of the importance and legitimacy commonly given to the world of media.



*Figure 2.09. A shop selling products “As seen on TV”*

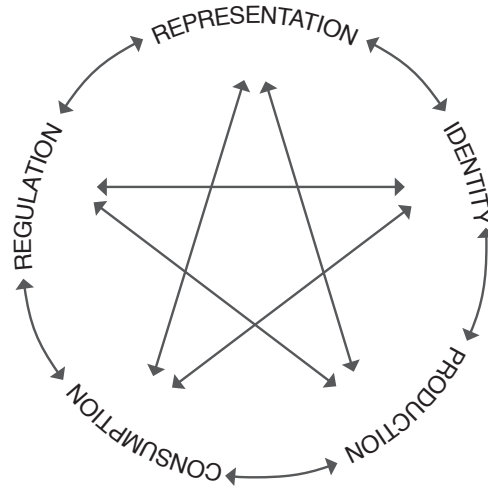
### 2.3.3 THE CIRCULATION OF CULTURE AND THE SOCIAL ROLE OF DESIGNERS

The way products are circulated and consumed through the media, and the impact of this, has been treated in the realm of cultural studies. Cultural Studies often focus on the biggest firms and political powers as key agents for capturing cultural changes; interpret them and release their outcomes to the consumers back in the cultural loop. This originates a circuit in which culture circulates through five phases: Representation, Identity, Production, Consumption and Regulation (DuGay, 1997). In this circuit, there is not a specific sequence that culture follows, but each phase is connected to all the others as an intricate network (Figure 2.10). Traditionally, product designers are to be found in the production of culture in the form of artefacts. At the same time, it is also true that their creations are dictated by their observations and interpretations on the culture they consume. Therefore designers are integrated in the network with an input-output role. However, the field of Cultural Studies often contextualizes the role of designers within the logics and strategies of large corporations and firms, leaving outside the independent designers this study wants to focus on.

Independent designers’ countenance into the ubiquitous world of media has carved out a role for themselves, similar to other “*cultural heroes*” in our society like successful musicians,



writers or stars of sorts (Kanter, 1989: 9–10). They are indeed individuals able to represent values and ideals and achieve some goal in society, such as awards, publications and participation in exhibitions. As heroes they cultivate their style and characteristics garnering them appeal to a certain market or clients (McCormack, 2006).



*Figure 2.10. The Circuit of Culture as described by DuGay et al., 1997*

Obviously, the appeal of a designer is not limited only to their clients, but also to the community that looks at the designers as examples to follow. Most notably, design students tend to follow the model of the designers that establish themselves through media, ending up feeding that same media industry that inspires them (Hecht, 2010). It is a circular pattern that exists within design education (Innella et al., 2011) as well as in the culture industry (DuGay, 1997) where designers are at the same time influencing trends, as well as influenced by market trends. The number of trend forecasting agencies monitoring design events (i.e., LS:N, Edelkoort Inc., etc.), and in particular that part of design with low physical access – which is traditionally on the outside of the mainstream industry – should serve as a clue to the fact that this represents the forefront of aesthetic and conceptual inspiration for the industry. However, because those aesthetics are made freely public through media and events, designers are not really trading their aesthetic consulting service to the industry (Innella et al., 2011: 18–23). Then it comes natural to ask what a designer is trading within this industry, which is the key question of this thesis.

## 2.3.4 THE FASHION INDUSTRY AND THE MEDIA

Angela McRobbie circumscribes her observations to the “*image industry*” in the context of fashion, explaining its relation with editors, journalists, photographers,

advertisers, models and designers (McRobbie, 1998: 151–174). The amount of different agendas and interests converging in the image industry generates a highly diplomatic approach, thus resulting in a jeopardized and mild content in terms of critique. While the critique is lacking, the need for more and more appealing visuals has grown. As a consequence new professions, like the one of the stylist – who puts the clothes in relation to other elements in the photoset – are born. These are new roles that lay their creative layer to the one of the fashion itself, extending the distance between the clothes on the rail and the ones printed on glossy paper. In this way fashion magazines became crucial stages for photographers, stylists, models and alike to publicize themselves and hope for future professional opportunities.

The thirst for visibility reaches the point that a professional might work for free, just to get on that stage. This mechanism is representative for the power of the media and the way media companies can easily trade visibility instead of money. Nevertheless a monetary trading does happen: not between the editor and the creative actors working for the magazine, but between the editor and the advertisers instead. Thanks to the work of the creative minds involved in a design magazine, the publication itself becomes an appealing context with its own culturally and socially selected audience of consumers. The market segmentation observed by the field of cultural studies, finds here a practical example: the magazine is in fact the tool that allows companies to address their messages to a determined demographic group of consumers. Advertisers include their messages among the magazine's content, associating their products to its values. So while designers and advertisers are both given of visibility on the same medium, the real difference lies in the presence on the market, where the advertised products are simply more accessible and affordable, leading to sales. The same principles do not apply to the designers' work, which remains extremely exclusive and economically marginal. However, once ascertained what is the actual situation, Angela McRobbie does not reveal what strategies designers adopt to obviate to it. Independent designers might not find a place in the mass market, but still find a place in the industry. The design practice, with the complicity and growth of the media has evolved in ways that have yet to be fully understood, which remain the broad aims of this thesis, namely:

- Aim A: To identify the relevant actors and their roles in the contemporary design industry.
- Aim B: To understand how the designer's and commissioner's media profile have an impact on their role in the design industry.
- Aim C: To understand what else a designer can trade, apart from the design of the artefacts and if this requires a new model for a design process.



## 2.3.5 CONCLUSIONS ON PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

The literature produced by philosophers such as Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard and Theodor Adorno sets the basis for observing the way culture is consumed in our society. Debord observes how our culture is based on the contemplation of the “spectacle”, intended as a set of images imposed on people and able to create an alternative reality. In the book the “Society of the Spectacle” (1967), the “spectacle” emerges as the context where culture is imposed through its pre-packaged representation, and received by the people, who are given the very passive role of an audience (Debord and Knabb, 1983). Adorno moves the attention from the consumers to the standardized way in which cultural commodities (movies, music, novels) are produced, distributed and consumed, presaging the presence of a structured economy of mass culture. His conclusions depict a system lying behind the creative industry. The highly standardized production of culture is regarded as responsible for the lack of originality and diversity on a global scale (Adorno and Bernstein, 2001; UNESCO, 1982). Baudrillard, extending from Marx’s concept of “commodity fetishism” brings the discourse back to the tangible artefacts. Baudrillard highlights how these products, as part of the production of culture, are charged with meanings and values, and are purchased for those added factors. The association of cultural meanings to physical goods results in a language that people share, defining a highly homogenous culture.

Reviewed critically, the literature from the field of Philosophy denotes a propensity for the macro-level of global consumption. The systems taken into account by the philosophers follow a linear and vertical path from the producers of commodities to the passive consumers, who are unable to escape the system. The writings of Adorno, Debord and Baudrillard on the production of culture suggest the existence of an economic model behind the consumption of culture commodities, but they are not explicit in explaining in details what ways the trade takes place, especially in relation to the design industry and practice. This study aims to understand how the designers fulfill this trading in their relationship with a commissioner and other actors of the design industry.

The field of Cultural Studies focuses on the way culture is generated, consumed and circulated in an endless loop. Unlike the literature from Philosophy, Cultural Studies provide very clear examples ranging from case studies of products like the Sony Walkman (DuGay, 1991) to the intangible goods for consumption, such as the programs of TV channel MTV (Levinson, 1995). Cultural studies does not look at the cultural industry as a vertical system imposed on the people. It offers instead a circular model, in which the consumers are part and parcel of the production of culture. However, the commercial agent in this system is still represented by larger corporations, whose evolution through the years is extensively described. The studies in this field have observed the ability of brands in capturing cultural changes in society and

the appearance of new communities, therefore succeeding in addressing to the numerous segments that compose the mass market. DuGay and Mackay (1991, 1997) also noticed how the individuals that form larger corporations embody at the same time both the brand's spirit and the consumer's desires.

Once again the major limit that emerges from the literature deriving from Cultural Studies lies in the scale of the parts involved. The current state of design - or at least the niche of design with high *Media Attention* and low *Physical Accessibility* this study focuses on – does not put large corporations at its centre, but independent designers instead. The smaller size of these studio practices results in a different agenda and also a different social role than the one of larger firms. Brands might be involved as commissioners or clients in the profession of the designers operating in the context of design with low *Physical Accessibility* and high *Media Attention*, but their involvement in the designers' process has yet to be studied.

In McRobbie's view on the fashion industry, big corporations who can count on large distribution networks of clothes for cheap prices are the ones profiting from their presence on the fashion magazines, blending their advertisements with the content of the publications. Contrarily, designers are simply exploited and are unable to profit from their presence on the magazines. This system could be analogous to the one of the exclusive design this research looks at. However, it remains unclear what is the role of the designer in the economy of the design industry and how this impacts his or her practice. Furthermore, McRobbie does not bring concrete evidence and details supporting her descriptions, as her book aims to provide a more general overview on the fashion industry as a whole, rather than focusing on this specific aspect. While McRobbie (1998) observes very clearly the mechanisms of the image industry, she decides not to reveal how this context has impacted the profession of the designer. Although similarities with other kinds of design are foreseeable, McRobbie's writings scope is specifically on the world of fashion, therefore leaving space for research on other typologies of design.

Moving away from fashion media, further observations about other mediated contexts of design are to be found in some of the writings from the fields of economy and sociology. Authors Sassen (2002) and Sadini (2011) highlight the role of design events in shaping the identity of cities. The research conducted by Power and Jansson (2008) as well as the talks given by economist Klammer (2010) and journalist van Kester (2010) reinforce the idea that design festivals represent positive spins for the circulation of economic and creative value. Remarkably, the research coming from these fields looks at the whole picture, without really entering into the details of the interactions between the various actors involved in the design fairs. In particular, the way design festivals shape the profession of a designer in the current times seems to be left outside of the studies.

## 2.4 DESIGN WORKS AND DESIGN CRITIQUE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DESIGN AND MEDIA

The current situation of design in relation to its visibility on media has also inspired the work of some designers, instigating a certain critical approach in their work. This selection comprises design works that say something about the relationship of design and designers within the world of media and events.

### 2.4.1 DESIGNERS' WORKS CRITICIZING THE DESIGN INDUSTRY

Some of the works taken into consideration here serve as illustrations of the relationship between design and media. The first is the case of the work of Singaporean designer Hans Tan. In his works “Vitrine of a Vase” (Figure 2.11) and “Portrait of a Lamp” (Figure 2.12), both dated 2007, the Design Academy Eindhoven graduate blurs the line between an object and its mediated representation, whether the media is the exhibition of the object or its photographic print (Tan, 2007a; 2007b). In the same direction - maybe with more vivid humour – finds its place the “Set piece chair” by Swedish designer Peter Andersson (Figure 2.13 and 2.14), which consists of an unfinished armchair, hiding its missing parts when photographed from a specific angle (Anderson, 2007). Evidently, all these examples apply a Rene Magritte style (see artwork of Magritte, 1928) conceptual process, where the subject of the communication is the mediated representation rather than its content.

Similarly, the “Do Not Touch Chair” of Dominic Wilcox (2010) (Figure 2.15 and 2.16) consists of an electrified metal wire, placed on a plinth and bent in the shape of a chair playing the author’s recorded voice saying “Do Not Touch” each time a visitor makes physical contact with it. The interaction consists in challenging the visitor to move a metal hoop along the metal chair without touching it. This work can easily be described as a playful statement, highlighting the fact that design has become a commodity for visual consumption.



Figure 2.11. "Vitrine of a Vase" by Hans Tan, 2007



Figure 2.12. "Portrait of a Lamp" by Hans Tan, 2007



Figure 2.13 and 2.14. "Set Piece" by Peter Andersson, 2007

Also more established designers, like industrial designer Konstantin Grcic have delivered their rants against the state of design. In his exhibition "Design Parade" hosted at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, and curated by Thimo te Duits, a collection of his most famous pieces is exhibited in a linear catwalk-like arrangement (Design Art News, 2006) (Figure 2.17). Notably, an immoderate amount of studio spotlights is disposed on both sides of the catwalk, barely allowing visitors to view the exhibited artefacts. Again, this is an illustration of the dominance of the mediated contexts over the designed objects or their potential users.

With their objects and installations these designers seem to wonder whether the ultimate purpose of design is to perform a declared function of use or simply exist in the realm of representation.

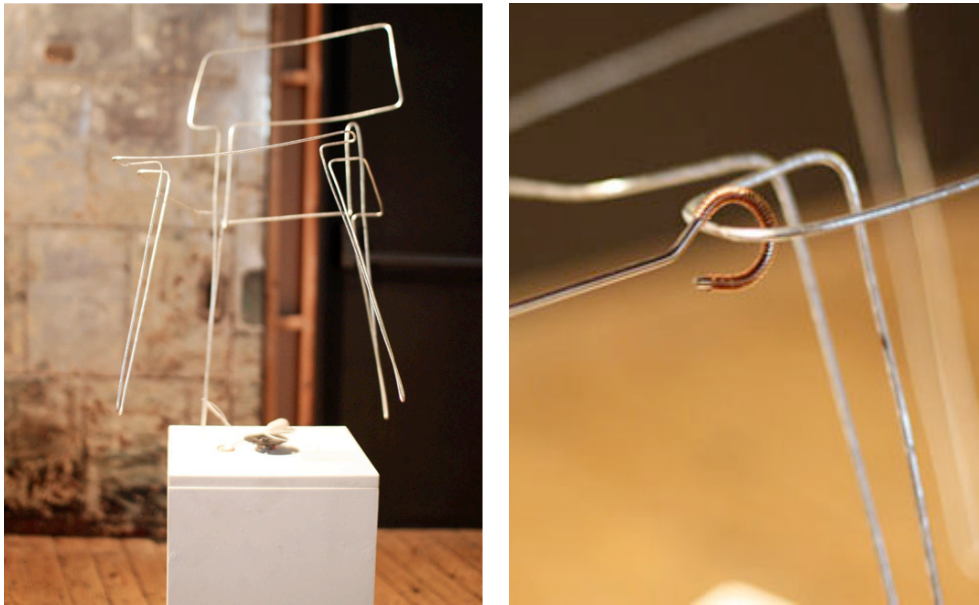


Figure 2.15 and 2.16. "Do Not Touch Chair" by Dominic Wilcox, 2011



Figure 2.17. "Design Parade" exhibition at the Boijmans Museum of Rotterdam by Konstantin Grcic and Thimo te Duits, 2006 (photo: Bob Goedewaagen)



Dutch author Bas van Beek gives a more punctual commentary on the role of a designer and what is being conveyed in his or her work. Van Beek's designs are often based on desecrating process over the work of the acclaimed Dutch designer Hella Jongerius, as an attempt of unmasking the identity that – according to van Beek – the media and she have built around her profession. Bas van Beek stated in an interview that:

*“Designers are fully aware of this new market of wealthy people who desire such status symbols. [...] now they want to buy the objects of designers like Hella Jongerius, but what they actually want to buy is her fabricated identity.” (van Beek and Kennedy, 2009)*

His work “Simulacra”, in which van Beek deliberately mocks one of the most iconic Jongerius' pieces with inexpensive IKEA items, is an example of his approach (Figure 2.18). Bas van Beek through his works invites the viewer to reflect on the status the designers and how their identity is transferred into the artefacts they design.



Figure 2.18. "Simulacra" by Bas van Beek, 2009 (photo: Leo Veger)

The context of museums and exhibitions, where design has steadily entered in the recent times has probably contributed in the creation of what some critics do not hesitate to describe as “*design vulgarism*” (Stella, Ike, and Geissbühler 2007). Dutch-Belgian design duo Studio Job have placed themselves on the international design scene with the design of oddly blown-up utilitarian objects like teapots, buckets, candleholders, respectively in mosaic tiles, bronze and rusty metal. Through the years Studio Job has developed a language resembling more the one of sculpture than the one of design for what concerns sizes and materials. Such a shift finds its functional legitimacy in the context they are conceived for: in an exhibition a giant,

rusty kettle results more spectacular – and therefore effective – than a nicely proportioned kettle, fitting for somebody’s home (Figure 2.19).



Figure 2.19. "The Last Supper" by Studio Job, 2009

The recent trend of design performances is even greater proof of the design event turned into a spectacle. During the Salone del Mobile 2009, fashion brand Fendi and the organizers of Design Miami/ gave birth to the event "Craft Punk". In this case, a selection of young up and coming international designers were invited to produce artefacts in front of the audience throughout the week. Some of the performances involved the use of scrap leather conveying a loose connection with Fendi's activities. However, most of the design performances starring young design-stars such as Nacho Carbonell, Studio Glithero and others, did not produce anything directly associated with Fendi's products, materials or expertise. Remarkably, one of the designers, Tomáš Gabzdil Libertíny, was sitting just outside the venue, soldering on a lathe rotational metal volumes. While producing these objects, he was sporting a leather Fendi coat to protect himself from the burning pieces of metal and that is how he was portrayed onto the media (Figure 2.20). That piece of garment worn by the designer determined the only connection with the commissioner. One might ask oneself, whether the outcome of such a commission is the object produced, the production process, or the designer wearing the Fendi coat. It is very hard to answer this question, as the media industry possesses the peculiarity of transforming anything – whether that is an artefact, a designer or a performance – simply into content ready to be consumed through design events or digital and printed media. MoMA curator Paola Antonelli asks herself whether these spectacles are a way to inform and educate or more merely to create a spectacle (Greff, 2009: 111–112).



*Figure 2.20. Designer Tomáš Gabzdil Libertíny soldering his piece in a Fendi leather coat for the “Craft Punk” event during the Salone del Mobile in Milan, 2009*

On this matter, the project “Collective Works” by Austrian design duo Mischer’Traxler finds its space. “Collective Works” is the outcome of an open commission by W Hotels and Design Miami/ resulting from the “W Hotels Designer of the future” award. “Collective Works” is an installation consisting of a machine that only produces vases when an audience looks at it; the larger the audience, the more colourful is the resulting vase (Figure 2.21 and 2.22) (Mischer’Traxler, 2011). If no one looks at the machine, the production simply stops. This project, presented at Design Miami/Basel 2011, stands as a facetious commentary on the state of the current design industry, that – as a spectacle – needs more viewers than users and that is fuelled by events and their attendance.

Design critics have probed the economic conditions under which young independent designers run their practice. Few design journalists, like Long (2006), McGuirk (2011) and Traldi (2011) raised concerns through articles on design magazines, newspapers and weeklies about the economic unsustainable condition for designers who develop their popularity on media hoping for attracting the attention of the industry. However, their observations are limited to the contemplation of the pay-by-royalty system, which results unsuccessful in assuring a sufficient income to the designers. More than answering those questions, such articles raise more doubts about the model that these independent designers follow and corroborate the need for more knowledge on this topic at this point of time.



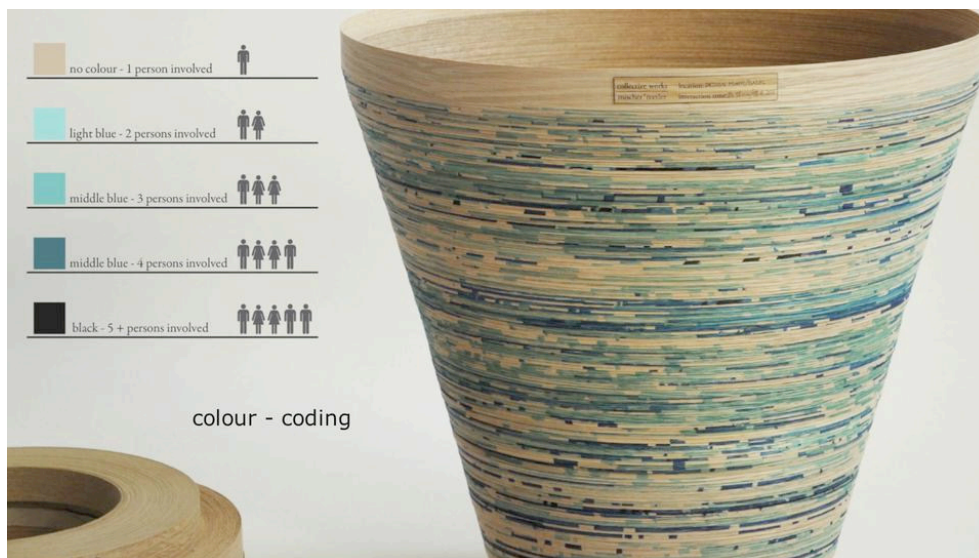


Figure 2.21 and 2.22. "Collective Works" by Mischer'Traxler, 2011

## 2.4.2 CONCLUSIONS ON DESIGN WORKS AND DESIGN CRITIQUE

Designers' works illustrate to a certain extent the relationship that design entertains with its representation and the mediated contexts. Their irony is a powerful tool in raising questions among the public to start a debate among the various actors in the community. This debate, however, never comes to a conclusion and in most cases it simply

makes even more explicit the already clear message of the designers.

Some other designers, instead, just take advantage of this relationship and develop their work within the mediated contexts. This is the case of Studio Job, for example, whose works are best displayed in exhibitions, rather than put in a domestic environment. These designers provide little hints of how their profession might function, in terms of activities and network. For instance, their press releases often feature a list of sponsors and partners, foreshadowing a complex network of actors and interests.

Unfortunately the attention of the press for the way designers work, hardly goes beyond the celebration of their designing activity. Thus meaning that the only information published on design media is about the design outcome and sometimes the process, intended as the development of concepts, the form-giving phase and the technical issues related to the act of designing.

## 2.5 SUMMARY

This chapter features a review of the literature from the fields of design history, Cultural Studies and Philosophy. The goal of this review on history of design chapter was one of providing a selective historical background on how the design industry has evolved through events and its presence on the media. The commodification of design events, the introduction of cultural institutions and brands as cultural intermediaries, the gradual celebration of the designer as a cultural hero, the growth of design in the media and the birth of design media have represented key events to the current state of the design industry. The selected events in history of design have drawn a possible trajectory that starting from the centrality of governments has progressively witnessed a fragmentation of powers ruling the design industry. The continuing penetration of design in the media – and the media in design – has influenced the way we see, experience and consume design today. Today, design is a significant part of our visual and popular culture. Thanks to direct access of the designers to the media, a new type of design has established itself. This design is characterized by small productions resulting in very limited editions or one-off pieces, opposed to a relatively high popularity on the media, especially if compared to their *Physical Accessibility* (see Figure 1.01). This type of design works on different principles than the traditional product and industrial design, bringing change in the way designers practice and conceive of their profession. Characterized by conceptual content and experimentation with materials it circulated in our culture mainly through media and events, rather than as products. Such changes enabled by the growth of media and design festivals have impacted the design industry.

Philosophy and Cultural Studies help us understand how culture is circulated in society. Through the use of media and marketing strategies, brands of products have augmented the value of their artefacts with intangible values and meanings associated with those. Marx described this phenomenon as “*commodity fetishism*”. Adorno and Baudrillard have described the role of these products in circulating and, to some extent, imposing culture on the people. Walter Benjamin focuses on the effects of photography as a production tool for distributing copies that replace the original artworks and the impact this can have in the way art is conceived. Debord portrays the way images constitute a “*spectacle*”, a “*mystified reality*” in which people live and interact. Hal Foster states that now architecture, design and art are conceived so to enter such spectacle by being represented in the media, as that constitutes a value.

The legitimacy acquired by the media and the increasing presence of design in such contexts have given to designers a crucial role in the circulation of culture. This has made them appealing to anyone interested in accessing such circuits. Angela McRobbie, in observing the fashion industry notices how fashion magazines are simply contexts for advertisers to blend with their design content. In such systems it is the big brands that profit from their presence on magazines, as their products are easily available on the market. Contrarily, the designers’

productions are often inaccessible props for the media industry.

The last part of this chapter has reviewed a number of selected works of designers on the relationship between media and design. Designers wittingly tried to depict aspects like the importance of how products are represented, or the irrelevance of function of use of designed objects in favour of their ability to catch attention. Designers also depict design as a spectacle. This finds confirmation also in the recent advent of design performances held during design festivals like the Salone del Mobile of Milan. During these happenings the act of making catalyzes the attention of media and public.

It is legitimate to think that the penetration of the media in design and design in the media brought radical changes into the practice of the designers. Their network, their design process, their social role and inevitably their professional model have transformed. This research aims to offer the point of view of the designers, trying to depict what their practice consists of in relation to their new role, tools and network.



# **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**



## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the methods adopted for the collection and subsequent analysis of the data for the preliminary and main studies.

This study examines the impact of the media on the design industry and reflects on the emerging roles of designers, curators, commissioners, media representatives, and other stakeholders in the design community today. This thesis proposes that alongside the design of artefacts, is a veritable wealth of goods, competencies and services being traded in the design arena, which until now has largely failed to be examined. As such the research looks for an answer to the key question:

**What commodities, apart from the design artefact, are being traded in the contemporary design industry and by whom?**

Seeking answers to the research question, different methods have been employed. These methods have generated a number of preliminary studies. The preliminary studies have informed the way the main study has been planned and conducted. Furthermore, the preliminary studies have also provided useful information to be considered in the discussion. These preliminary studies are described in the first part of this chapter. After that, the methods for data gathering, sampling of the case studies and designing the interviews of the main study are illustrated in this chapter. Moreover, the use of data visualizations as a tool for a richer content analysis adopted in the main study and presented in the case studies is explained in depth.



## 3.2 PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY OF PRELIMINARY STUDIES

In an attempt to provide a comprehensive investigation of the topic, this thesis adopted a *multiple methods design* while gathering and valuing both quantitative and qualitative data (Collins, 2010: 48–53). Initially, activities based on quantitative data were undertaken in order to learn more about some aspects this research touched upon, like what constitutes a media-profile and what factors influence it. Those activities were preferred because in some cases they could have been carried out in a discrete way, without having to engage with other professionals, or remotely, thus not requiring high investments of time and money. The initial activities have helped in exploring the territory and improving the knowledge about the context. However they also have led to new important questions, which did not seem to find an answer through quantitative data sets. So, in order to provide the required insights, qualitative research activities have been planned and undertaken. Quantitative and qualitative data have been embedded to build the necessary knowledge to carry out this research (Collins, 2010: 50). In this section I describe all the activities constituting this research, how each has informed the other and their role in the whole research.

The preliminary studies undertaken to inform this research are threefold:

- A survey distributed to twelve selected designers.
- The collection and analysis of data deriving from the use of Google Alerts.
- The shadowing in FormaFantasma's design studio before the Salone del Mobile of Milan 2011.

### 3.2.1 QUESTIONNAIRE: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP DESIGNER-MEDIA

While research questions were being formulated, a survey among twelve European designers has been conducted. This exploratory survey featured several questions to be answered with the aid of a Lickert scale. Its aim was to help understanding how designers value on an economic and personal level their visibility on design and non-design media (see Appendix I).

Selected designers, to whom has been granted anonymity, met the following criteria:

- Being the founder and owner of an independent design practice.
- Being under 40 years old.

- Having graduated between 2000 and 2009.
- Being currently based in Europe.
- Having more than one piece of work featured on international magazines and exhibited in international design events

These requirements were needed to have a homogenous profile across the surveyed subjects, that responded to the one of a young designer with a media profile. Firstly, the finding that arose from the survey made clear that the majority of the selected designers (58%) are in charge of the public relations of their studio. Secondly, it emerged that designers consider their visibility in exhibitions, magazines and websites more as a personal achievement, rather than an economic opportunity. Thirdly, the survey highlighted that, on a personal level, the chosen designers sensibly gave preference to publications on non-design media (Figure 3.01).

As an exploratory study on how designers perceive and value their presence on the media and exhibitions, the survey led to two conclusions:

- The fact that designers do not recognize high economic benefits from their presence on the media suggests that monetary profits is not a direct consequence of visibility, and more steps are required to monetize from that.
- The fact that designers' personal realization is higher when their work is presented on non-design media hints at the ambition of the designers to establish themselves as authors beyond the limits of the world of design and with a greater impact on popular culture.

The fact that designers do not see economic value on being visible in mediated contexts reinforced the need for a deeper study that would clarify the role of visibility for the development of the designers' career and its impact within the design industry.

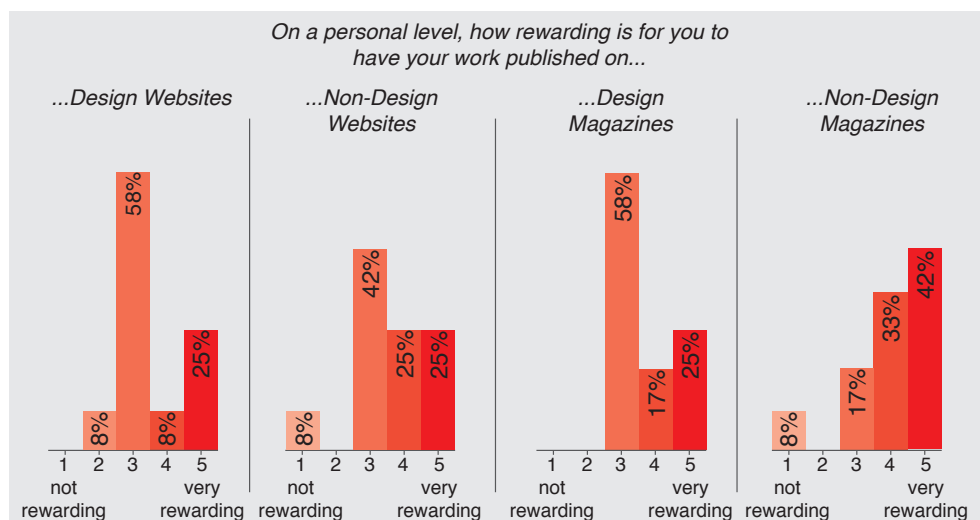


Figure 3.01. Some results from the questionnaire with twelve selected designers

### 3.2.2 UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA PROFILE: GOOGLE ALERTS

During the past three years, Google Alerts has been the analyst scribing the online presence of a selected clique of design professionals and organizations. Google Alerts is a free tool provided by Google Inc. that:

*“[...] automatically notifies users when new content from news, web, blogs, video and/or discussion groups matches a set of search terms selected by the user” (From Wikipedia)*

Towards the end of February 2011, alerts were set for key names of designers and organizations representatives of this industry, like “Maarten Baas”, “Studio Job”, “Lanzavecchia+Wai”, “Joris Laarman”, “Nacho Carbonell”, “FormaFantasma”, “Marcel Wanders”, “MischerTraxler”, “Droog Design”, “Rossana Orlandi”, “Dezeen”, “Design Academy Eindhoven”, “Tom Dixon” and “Hella Jongerius”. Results that were not relative to the searched subjects were manually filtered. For instance, alerts advertising job placements, which would appear under “studio job”, or the “Tom Dixon” alerts produced in relation to other people with the same name of the British designer (i.e., The Tom Dixon’s Band) were excluded from the counting. The limits of this tool in terms of precision and reliability are notorious (Bansal and Koudas, 2007). Some alerts might arrive with a delay of days and in some cases not be detected at all. However, the collection of weekly reports instead of daily ones and the prolonged use of this method for a period of about thirty months, allowed enough data to observe some clear patterns, and find relations with relevant events for the design community.

The main goal of this discrete monitoring activity was to better understand how the on-line presence of selected designers would vary through the year and what factors would impact the popularity of a designer on the Internet.

After having collected a great amount of data, few considerations could be made. Specifically there are two different trends that are particularly evident when the data deriving from alerts set for “Marcel Wanders” (the famous Dutch designer), “Rossana Orlandi” (a notorious gallerist and talent scout in Milan), and “FormaFantasma” (a young Italian design duo based in Eindhoven, NL) are compared (Figure 3.02).

In the first place it is noticeable how the keywords “Marcel Wanders” normally generate a higher amount of alerts than the other two. In fact, its average in the period of this study has been of 18.5 alerts per week, while “FormaFantasma” and “Rossana Orlandi” registered a mean value of 2.9 and 3.8 alerts respectively. By receiving and compiling the weekly report, it has also been possible to have an overview of what kind of sites mention the name of each query. Marcel Wanders is ubiquitous to the world of media. Websites generating alerts for his name vary from on-line stores selling items he has designed or replicas of his works, users’ blogs featuring images of his creations, lifestyle online magazines, and sometimes also

prestigious newspapers like the New York Times (Scelfo, 2009) or Financial Times (Wrathall, 2012) featuring reviews or interviews with Marcel Wanders.

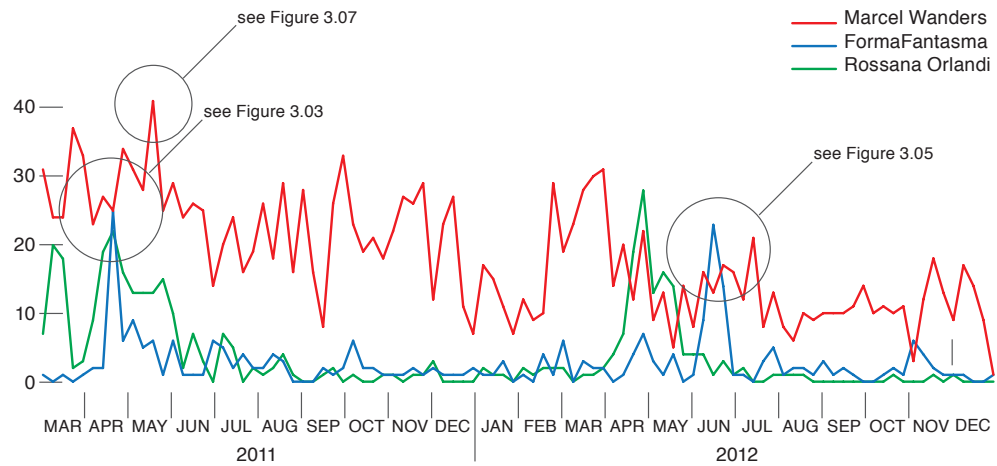


Figure 3.02. Number of alerts per week (y) from March 2011 until December 2012.

FormaFantasma and Rossana Orlandi are mentioned predominantly by trend forecasting websites and blogs, people's blogs, lifestyle and design on-line magazines, occasionally occupying space in international newspapers. Unlike Marcel Wanders, FormaFantasma cannot count on the mentions from websites selling their products or replica of those, as they don't have largely produced and distributed items.

However, the inequality of alerts between Marcel Wanders and FormaFantasma has been disrupted twice since March 2011. This occurrence first happened in the week between 18<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April 2011, right after the closing of the Salone del Mobile of Milan – the main design event of the year worldwide. That week, FormaFantasma and Marcel Wanders could count 25 alerts each and the two graphs, so far largely apart, could finally meet. Symbolically it was like FormaFantasma and Marcel Wanders shook hands as two on par colleagues (Figure 3.03).

During the Salone del Mobile of Milan 2011, FormaFantasma had presented three new works, namely the Migration Rug for the Italian small rug company Nodus, the Domestica Chair for Milanese gallery Dilmos and Botanica, a collection of vases and vessels commissioned by Plart, the museum of plastics in Naples. Of the three, Botanica was the project that captured most *Media Attention*; receiving praise from authoritative figures such as Paola Antonelli and Alice Rawsthorn. Coincidentally, a peak in the amount of Google Alerts (22) for "Rossana Orlandi", a disused textile shop converted into a design shop hosting exhibitions of upcoming and established designers, also emerged. It was at Rossana Orlandi's that FormaFantasma presented their Botanica collection (Figure 3.04). Most websites mentioning the Botanica project therefore also mentioned Rossana Orlandi and the commissioner Plart. So in that peak there is much more than just the name of the designers, there is also the name of the host and of the commissioner. Although the attention is on the designers, the spotlights are also turned onto the other parties involved.

A similar situation occurred more than a year later in the week between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2012, coinciding with the international fair of Design Miami/Basel. In this week 23 alerts – about 8 times FormaFantasma’s average – mention the name of the Italian duo (Figure 3.05). The alerts were triggered by two new projects undertaken by the pair and presented in Basel namely, Craftica commissioned by fashion house Fendi and consisting in a collection of items making use of leather leftovers and Charcoal, a series of carbonized artefacts for the purification of water, commissioned by Vitra Museum (Figure 3.06).

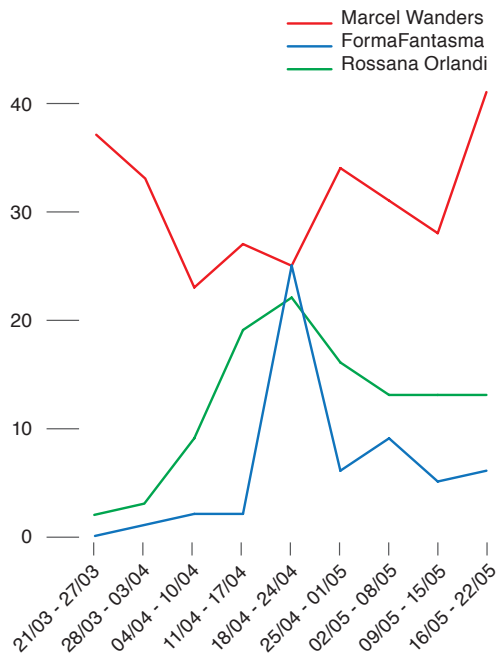


Figure 3.03. FormaFantasma and Marcel Wanders both registering 25 alerts in correspondence with the Salone del Mobile of Milan 2011



Figure 3.04. “Botanica” collection by FormaFantasma presented at Spazio Rossana Orlandi during the Salone del Mobile of Milan 2011

Also the trend of the alerts for Marcel Wanders sees its ups and downs. The highest peak for Marcel Wanders was reached between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2011, when his name is mentioned by 41 online publications (Figure 3.07). Alongside his regular appearances on e-stores selling the items created and signed by him, there is also another factor contributing to this peak: his collaboration with British department store Marks & Spencer on a collection of gifts and homeware ranges had been made public (Figure 3.08). The news was worthy of mention in the Financial Times.

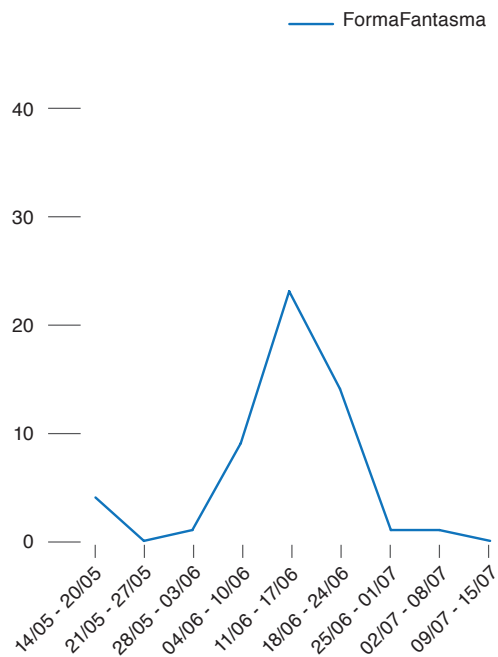


Figure 3.05. FormaFantasma registering 23 alerts when they presented their projects commissioned by Fendi and Vitra Museum at Design Miami/Basel 2012



Figure 3.06. Two pieces of the collection "Craftica" by FormaFantasma commissioned by Fendi and presented during Design Miami/Basel 2012

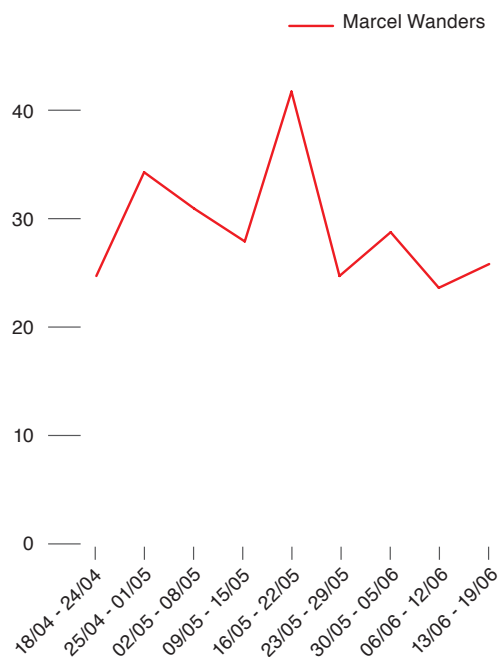


Figure 3.07. A peak of alerts for Marcel Wanders when his collaboration with Marks & Spencer had been made public



Figure 3.08. "Snow Man" vase, one of the products designed by Marcel Wanders for brand Marks & Spencer

The anomalies in the attention garnered by selected representatives of the design industry that the study has highlighted, lead to two main observations:

- In most cases, the presentation of a new project in certain contexts reveals a moment of attention independent from the fact that the outcomes are easily available to anyone or not up for sale at all.
- Anybody associated with the project could benefit from this attention, thus hinting to an interdependent relationship among the actors of the design industry.

As a preliminary study this activity has generated more questions than answers. Looking at those crests in the graph few inquisitive thoughts started taking form. More precisely it was then evident the need for more material about three layers of information responding to the following questions:

- How are those peaks built and experienced by designers and other professionals involved?
- Can those attention peaks be the objects of a trade?

The information provided by Google Alerts offers some hints about what causes media attention. However, the number of alerts and its variations does not really inform about how visibility on web impacts the career of a designer or the design industry. This activity, which is clearly a quantitative one, propagated the need for more qualitative information that is why other activities had been planned afterwards.

### 3.2.3 SHADOWING FORMAFANTASMA

Driven by the need to better understand the way designers prepare to major design events, it was now time to examine behind the scenes of design shows. In this pursuit, shadowing was selected to tap into the working life in a design studio prior to the Salone del Mobile of Milan. Shadowing is a technique consisting in following selected subjects through their activities in order to gather insights that otherwise would not be visible (Martin and Hanington, 2012:158).

Immediately before the Salone del Mobile of Milan 2011, I had the opportunity to spend sixteen days in the studio of Italian design duo FormaFantasma. They were chosen as subjects because of their recent prominence in design media and exhibitions. Additionally, I was privileged to share an informal relationship with the pair having met them while studying at the Design Academy Eindhoven. Based in Eindhoven, FormaFantasma is a practice created by Simone Farresin and Andrea Trimarchi. Their work is characterized by refined aesthetics with a sense of nostalgia and romanticism provided by the use of natural materials and



craft processes. Projects are usually inspired by recent cultural changes, such as migration of populations, survival in times of crisis or revival of dismissed production techniques. Typically, they create furniture or homeware artefacts as outcomes. These pieces have been exhibited in numerous fairs and events and are part of public and private collections such as Droog and the Art Institute of Chicago.

While spending time in the studio with the designers, it had been possible to witness their workflow, listen to their conversations and share a few lunch breaks with them. The studio was in the process of finalizing three projects corresponding with three commissions received from the Italian rug company Nodus, the Milanese design gallery Dilmos and Plart, the museum of plastics in Naples. Remarkably, they allowed me to monitor their work email account after agreeing to keep certain information confidential. Each received and professionally meaningful message has been classified among three categories, namely: “Project”, “Organization” and “Communication”. In the first category all the communications treating the design of the artefacts as their main topic had been included. This category mainly featured conversations with material suppliers and craftsmen helping to actualize some of the artefacts or details, as well as consultants they requested advice from regarding technical aspects of their projects. The “Organization” category contained all the messages concerning payments, invoices, transportation, insurance and various administrative contracts. The “Communication” category included correspondence about press releases, arrangement of photo shoots, exhibitions and interviews. The results of this activity are shown in Figure 3.09.

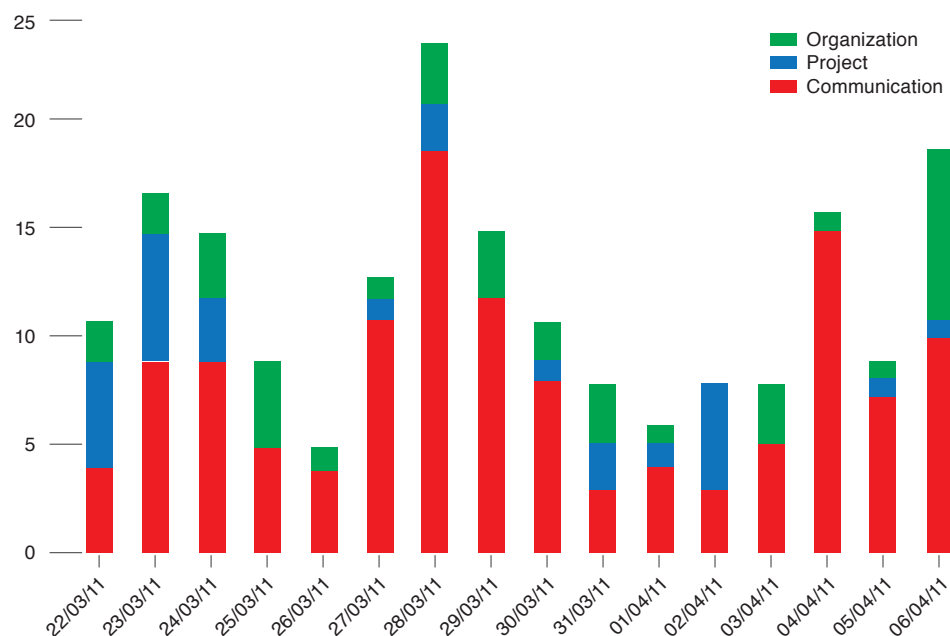


Figure 3.09. Report of FormaFantasma's monitoring activity

This activity highlights that emails concerning communication issues are larger in volume. Notably, on Monday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, FormaFantasma's email volume peaked. This day was the



first working day after the press release issued by FormaFantasma to their numerous contacts on March 26<sup>th</sup> communicating the exhibition of their projects at the fair, therefore accounting for the increase. The distribution of the press release sparked numerous reactions. Various colleagues and friends sent compliments, online and printed press asked for additional information and visual material, galleries and potential clients started investigating possible collaborations and uses of the artefacts in future exhibitions.

FormaFantasma manage the media maintaining a delicate balance between the need to perpetuate their work through online media so that curiosity and expectation is instilled in the audience, and being careful not to distribute the visuals too early, which would limit media attention in the aftermath. High-resolution images are a precious commodity, which are made available only after the fair, so to protract media presence. The furniture fair was also an opportunity for FormaFantasma to accept numerous invitations from journalists and bloggers to be interviewed. These were cumbersome to arrange and a calendar already overflowing with cocktail parties and opening soon struggled to contain a host of interviews. However the interviews were key in improving their media-profile and prolonging their presence on the media after the fair.

Among the many emails concerning communication matters, one in particular is worth mentioning. This email came from the owner of rug company Nodus, commissioner of the carpet collection Migration (Figure 3.10). Once images and text describing the project were ready, he kindly asked FormaFantasma if they could take care of sending the material to some specified design websites, as he was unsuccessful in previous attempts to publish there. FormaFantasma replied that they would have certainly done it as they had a good relationship with the editors of those websites. This anecdote is explicatory of how designers could serve as decisive hubs for commissioners to be featured on the media.

For FormaFantasma, one of the main objectives is to attract as much audience traffic as possible to the venues where they were presenting. This is not only for their benefit, but also for the advantage of the hosting venue, which is keen to garner a swarm of visitors. Therefore, it is crucial that on-line traffic materializes into physical traffic, and this requires precise effort and skill. Press releases are crafted carefully and distributed generously. Many recipients auto-reply requesting a re-address of the email, thus requiring constant vigilance over their carefully divided mailing list. FormaFantasma say:

*“after the press release is sent, it is hell. Everybody asks for something”*

That hell hides a multiplicity of opportunities. For instance, in the case of the press releases for the Domestica chair commissioned by gallery Dilmos (Figure 3.11), an agent of Tommy Hilfiger Europe manifested some interest. Apparently, the chair would have fit in perfectly with the new vitrines and interiors of Hilfiger shops. Although FormaFantasma does not have much control over that artifact as that belongs to the commissioner, it is FormaFantasma

that has to connect this possible client with Dilmos. This is a task the designers are happy to undertake because, as Andrea Trimarchi says:

*“it shows the commissioner that we are able to find potential buyers”*

This quote makes two important points apparent. The first point is that their mailing list includes possible clients; the second one is that the commissioner somehow expects the designers to enlarge their catchment area.



*Figure 3.10. A detail of one of the three carpets of the collection “Migration” by FormaFantasma*



*Figure 3.11. The “Domestica” chair by FormaFantasma*

FormaFantasma cherish communication to the point that it becomes hard to decipher their design from its communication. Their project Botanica is a masterpiece in that sense. Presented at the Spazio Rossana Orlandi, it was exhibited with a booklet describing the meaning and the process of the project. FormaFantasma produced the layout, graphics, photography and text of this booklet. They also carefully chose the paper to use for the communication material. When the commissioner, Plart, suggested some changes, Farresin and Trimarchi firmly objected as if that would interfere with the very core of their design project. The only request satisfied was the inclusion of a paragraph written by Marco Petroni, Plart’s director.

The images distributed have also been crafted with great care and precision. FormaFantasma’s trustworthy photographer Luisa Zanzani drove all the way from Germany with her equipment. A location was sought after and finally discovered in a disused factory in Eindhoven. The

fragile pieces, had to be brought there, together with plinths and props. Finally a three-days long photo-shoot was conducted, absorbing about ten per cent of the lump sum payment agreed with the commissioner. But great care regarding communication is not only dedicated to printed materials. When prototypes are received or completed, the stress levels at FormaFantasma studio is elevated. The artefacts are placed on pedestals and observed carefully, different lights are tried from different angles, trying to predict how they will look in the exhibition. The plinths themselves are designed ad-hoc for the collection. The sensation while witnessing their process was similar to witnessing a theatre rehearsal, where scenography and costumes are crucial supports to the play.

At the end of this experience three considerations could be made:

- Behind the communication that FormaFantasma produces there is a considerable investment in terms of time and money. Arranging and undertaking interviews, preparing press releases and photo-shootings and managing and updating the mailing list are all activities that are undertaken by the designers themselves
- The work of FormaFantasma includes much more than the artefacts. Naturally the pieces play a central role, but the way those are displayed and depicted is also carefully designed. The designers do not allow anybody to interfere with the design process behind the way the pieces are exhibited or photographed, apart from trusted people that they decide to involve. Furthermore the crafting of images and communication implies a cost for the designers who had to pay photographer Luisa Zanzani.
- The designers' contacts are a resource for the commissioner to access mediated contexts that would be precluded otherwise, as proved by the request of the Nodus owner about the designers taking care of relationship with design media.

This shadowing study provided valuable insights and data. However, the specificity of the period of staying at FormaFantasma's studio does not allow for generalizations about the interactions between the designers, the commissioners and the media. A prolonged shadowing period would not have been possible due to the unease created by my presence, especially during such stressful periods like the preparation for the major design events. Moreover, keeping in mind the desire to understand more about the trading occurring in the design industry, this activity made clearer the necessity of extending the research into multiple case-studies, investigating the counterpart of a design commission, which is represented by the commissioner.

### 3.2.4 CONCLUSIONS FROM PRELIMINARY STUDIES

The preliminary studies served as an exploration of the territory of this research, providing interesting information on the relationship between the media and design. Furthermore, the preliminary studies have informed this research on the methodology to adopt for the main study.

The first survey has revealed that the benefits for the designers from their visibility are clearly not monetary. Therefore a deeper investigation had to be made in order to understand what are the advantages for designers to garner visibility in broader terms.

The study involving the use of Google Alerts has revealed a direct correlation between the design events and the popularity on the media of selected designers. Additionally, the study has hinted at a more complex network of relations connecting designers, commissioners and hosting venues. Such networks need to be investigated further in order to better understand the economy of the current design industry and its actors

Finally, shadowing design studio FormaFantasma provided crucial information about the significance for designers to take care of the way projects are communicated, thus suggesting the value of the designers' network with media representatives.

The preliminary studies presented limits compromising the development of an in-depth study. The survey and the analysis of the Google Alerts demanded for qualitative information to make sense of the phenomena and patterns the quantitative data helped to identify. The shadowing activity suggested the adoption of a study with multiple-cases, besides triggering the longing for listening to the voice of commissioners counterbalancing the opinions and information of the designers. These observations have helped while designing the main study.

## 3.3 PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE MAIN STUDY

The preliminary studies aforementioned contributed to a better framing of the research's general aim, which consists in understanding the impact of the media in the design industry. In order to pursue this goal, preliminary studies hinted at the need for more qualitative data informing on a broader territory than the one offered by the sole designers' perspective, thus extending also to the one of the commissioners. In the next section the criteria adopted in order to grant the right balance of consistency and variety among the case studies is described. Successively the methodology used to gather, filter, display and analyze the data is illustrated further in this chapter.

### 3.3.1 THEORETICAL SAMPLING OF THE CASE-STUDIES

This research is necessitated by the recent spread of designed artefacts in the media, as well by the magnitude that design events have reached. Seeking a better understanding of the industry that spins around design and the media, the research looks at projects that have generated an outcome belonging to the typology of furniture and household products that have been represented in mediated contexts, like magazines, websites and exhibitions. The visibility of those items becomes even more striking when put in relation with their limited accessibility by the broader consumer audience. The contrast between the high visibility and the low accessibility of the designed artefacts is a symptom of a design industry that has overtaken the conventional relationship with the media based on the advertisement of goods for the broader market. In order to better understand such an industry, only projects resulting in items that have been produced in limited numbers and largely represented in the media and exhibitions have been taken into account.

Aiming to better understand what is being traded in the design industry, this study identifies commissions as exchanges between two parties, namely a *Commissioner* and a *Designer*. The offerings and demands from each side of a commission represent the core and simplest trading of any industry, from which a complex economy develops. In order to describe and comprehend such trade, *Designers* and *Commissioners* have been chosen as the source for primary data, invited to relate and reflect on selected commissions and more generally on their experience in the design industry. Given the fact that each commission has generated an outcome ascribable to the typology of furniture and household products, the aim of the interviews was to reveal what material and immaterial commodities other than the design and

production of the designed artefacts, play a role in the trade. For this study, case studies are represented by commissions responding to the following requirements:

- Commission works undertaken by a designer or design studio.
- Commissions resulting in artefacts belonging to the typology of furniture or households products.
- Commissions whose outcomes have been exhibited and published in international contexts.
- Commissions whose outcomes are produced in less than 12 editions.

In the following sub-sections the criteria for sampling designers and commissioners to interview are described.

### 3.3.2.1 THE DESIGNERS

The *Designers* taking part in the interviews are all independent professionals. Their studios are relatively small, with one or two designers, who are also the founders and owners. The limited size of these practices is conducive to engaging with professionals that are completely aware and in control of all the agreements and communications with the commissioners and the other parties of the project. These professionals are responsible for the most crucial decisions in the design process, from its ideation to the detailing of the final artefact, and often its display, representation and dissemination onto the media. These individuals or couples, physically and legally represent the studio, taking care of any of its aspects and activities, to the point that one could state that they are the studio. In fact they personify the studio's vision, methods and identity. Exactly because they are directly and fully exposed to any issue emerging in the process and management of a design project, as well as the communication, positioning and branding of their practice, they are well aware of the logics and functioning of the industry they operate in. This is in fact the main reason for their involvement in this study. Finally, the selected designers responded to the following criteria:

- *Designers* who are the founder and owner of a design practice of maximum two people.
- *Designers* whose work has been published and exhibited in international contexts.
- *Designers* based in Europe.

### 3.3.2.2 THE COMMISSIONERS

The *Commissioner* of a design project is someone who approaches a designer in order to secure his or her service. Observing carefully the world of contemporary design that attracts the attention of the media, it is noticeable how projects are originated mainly by



three typologies of commissioners. For this research the three categories are defined as:

- **Design Galleries**

Design Galleries are retailers that distribute exclusive editions of design artefacts. Some of these enterprises are also involved in facilitating the production of the items. In this study, representatives for Design Galleries are: Droog Design (Amsterdam), and Carwan Gallery (Milan and Beirut).

- **Commercial Brands**

Commercial Brands are any commercial company, venture or enterprise privately owned, traditionally operating on other activities than the production, promotion or sale of furniture or household products. In this study commissioners belonging to the category of Commercial Brands are: Phaidon publishers, the automotive brand Mercedes and the design magazine Case da Abitare.

- **Cultural Institutions**

Cultural Institutions are those entities, publicly or privately owned, that have an educational or social purpose and play a role in the broad fields of arts, science, history or more generally culture. Examples of these Institutions included in the study are: Plart Foundation (Naples) and Witte de With (Rotterdam).

Another category is also present among *Commissioners* of the *Designers* operating in the context of high *Media Attention*, that is Design Brands. Design Brands are companies who are directly involved in the manufacturing, advertisement and sale of designed goods, limited to furniture and household products for this study. Although Design Brands often own one or more flagship stores, they also distribute through other channels. Examples of Design Brands are Moooi, Established & Sons, Lansvelt, Cappellini, Alessi, etc. Design Brands differ from Design Galleries for their considerably higher volumes of production and sales. Exactly for this reason, they have been excluded. In fact the higher *Physical Accessibility* characterizing their productions falls outside of the scope of this study.

In order to fulfil this research with enough breadth, allowing general reflections on the design industry, the selection of *Commissioners* features at least one commissioner for each of the three categories described above. So the choice of the *Commissioners* responded to the following criteria:

- At least one *Commissioner* for each of the three categories.
- *Commissioners* based in Europe.

### 3.3.2.3 FINAL SELECTION OF CASE STUDIES

Six case studies constitute the primary source for data and information. The six case studies cover the three typologies of *Commissioners*, thus meaning that the

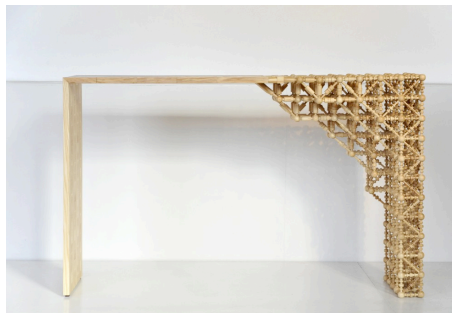
research strategy makes use of at least one case study for each typology of commission. The six commissions analyzed in this thesis represent a satisfactory wealth of data while aligning with the availability of time and economic resources. The final selection of case studies features the following projects, *Designers* and *Commissioners*:

- Wood Ring Bench (designed by Chris Kabel based in Rotterdam, The Netherlands; commissioned by Witte de With and Tent based in Rotterdam, The Netherlands) (Figure 3.12).



*Figure 3.12. Wood Ring Bench by Chris Kabel*

- Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard (designed by Mischer'Traxler based in Vienna Austria; commissioned by Carwan Gallery based in Beirut, Lebanon, and Milan, Italy) (Figure 3.13).



*Figure 3.13. Gradient Mashrabiya by Misher'Traxler*

- Dusk / Dawn Mirror (designed by Minale-Maeda based in Rotterdam, The Netherlands; commissioned by Droog Design based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands) (Figure 3.14).



*Figure 3.14. Dusk / Dawn Mirror by Minale-Maeda*

- Coloured Vases (designed by Hella Jongerius based in Berlin, Germany; commissioned by Phaidon Press based in London, England) (Figure 3.15).





*Figure 3.15. Some of the 300 Coloured Vases by Hella Jongerius*

- Streamline Carpet and Torque Vases (designed by Lanzavecchia + Wai based in Pavia, Italy, and Singapore; commissioned by Case da Abitare based in Milan, Italy. This commission also sees the involvement of automotive brand Mercedes-Benz) (Figure 39).



*Figure 3.16. Streamline Carpet by Lanzavecchia + Wai*

- Botanica Collection (designed by FormaFantasma, based in Eindhoven, The Netherlands; commissioned by Fondazione Plart based in Naples, Italy) (Figure 40).



*Figure 3.17. Two pieces of the Botanica Collection by FormaFantasma*

In the next chapter illustrating the case studies deriving from the research activity, each *Designer*, *Commissioner* and the resulting outcomes will be described in greater depth.

### 3.3.2.4 THE GEOGRAPHY OF THIS STUDY

This study observes a phenomenon – the proliferation of a type of design with high visibility and low accessibility – that is particularly evident in Europe, where design constitutes a popular subject in the media and events. However traces of a similar ethos can be found in most Countries hosting major design festivals. Aiming to cover the European

context, the research includes case studies whose main actors are active and involved in many cities across the European continent.

All the selected *Designers* have been educated at the Design Academy Eindhoven. This aspect is not casual, but rather looked after, making the Design Academy a sort of gravity centre for this research. The Netherlands and in particular the Design Academy Eindhoven has been considered for the last two decades as the epicentre of a specific approach to design. The result of this approach, which has been generally labelled as Dutch Design, sees the central role of conceptual statements, resulting in designed artefacts as more or less explicit illustrations of such concepts. Through the years this design philosophy has developed, often abandoning the initial aesthetics characterized by a ready-made look, and rough materials, gaining in details and refinements. Also the stories that these objects tell have changed through the time, remaining in the best cases current and provocative. Some other times the conceptual push of the objects blunted in the background, made less explicit or substituted by experimentation with materials questioning the conventional manufacturing processes or idea of sustainability. However, one distinctive aspect has always remained the same: the great visibility on the media of the designed artefacts and their authors, paired with inaccessibility for the broader audience of consumers. Since its consolidation in the Netherlands, the combination of high visibility and low accessibility became an established model within the design industry in Europe. What was labelled as Dutch Design has now become an established model internationally, all over Europe.

Design Academy Eindhoven attracts students from all over the world, training them to the rather conceptual approach peculiar of Dutch design. As a Design Academy student you are expected to build your authorship by developing recognizable aesthetics and concepts. Given the school's prominence in the media and festivals, its students are quickly exposed to media representatives and event organizers who require visuals to publish and materials to exhibit. Also for internal finals, exhibitions are adopted as an evaluation tool. So teachers and heads often make their evaluations of the students based on how efficiently the works perform as pieces to show. The design culture and adopted process of Design Academy represents a terrific – and sometimes very stressful – training to the most contemporary design industry characterized by high visibility. These graduates then start their practices wherever they prefer in Europe, often choosing to stay in Holland where they have a chance of building a local network and also where an offering of funds and grants facilitates such decision. Alternatively Design Academy graduates often choose to return to their home Countries, where they are familiar with the context and networks. However their reputation is usually built through the Design Academy context and reach. Sometimes it is their thesis project that shines onto the media, contributing factor is also the participation of Design Academy Eindhoven to established design events the likes of the Fuorisalone Milan or Dutch Design Week. Additionally the annual graduation shows of the Design Academy Eindhoven, with its 28.000 attendants, are true catalysts for visitors and media representatives (Design Academy Eindhoven, 2011).

The most successful students not only possess great design and making skills, but they also show a certain confidence in establishing and managing their relationships with press and event organizers. They take great care about the messages they emit through the media, how their work is represented and in identifying their audience. They also develop the technical and organizational skills for regularly taking part in exhibitions and publications. All these skills are not taught in a conventional way, but they are rather learned in an empirical manner. Many Design Academy Eindhoven graduates represent a new generation of designers that develop a new body of work, new skills and new networks. Designers with similar characteristics now also regularly graduate from other top European design schools like the Royal College of Art in London and the Ecole Cantonale des Arts Lausanne. These schools have gained a certain prominence on the media and during festivals, and they have embraced the current direction for the design industry. The designers' experience at the Design Academy Eindhoven guaranteed their deep familiarity with the exclusive design characterized by low physical access and high visibility, to the point that they can be considered representatives of such reality.

While their education at Design Academy Eindhoven was a fixed criterion for the selection of the *Designers*, a great diversity in terms of gender, age, graduation year, level of education (bachelor or master), nationality, and Country of residence is evident. This level of diversity helped to have a broader view on the observed context, and a better understanding on the trading occurring there.

The selection of *Designers* that have received an education at the Design Academy Eindhoven may raise concerns about the geographical limitation of the study. However, such concerns are waived by the inclusion of designers that are native, based or trained in countries other than The Netherlands, as well as Dutch designers that operate abroad, even including two studios with Asian components in their formation. Aiming to provide an international dimension to this study, the selection of designers has therefore covered four typologies of cases:

- Dutch designers based in the Netherlands
- Non-Dutch designers based in the Netherlands
- Non-Dutch designers based in their Country of origin
- Dutch designers based outside the Netherlands

Similarly to the *Designers*, *Commissioners* have also been selected in order to cover as much of the European context and its periphery as possible extending as far as Lebanon. By including cases in which the *Commissioners* and the *Designers* are based in the same Country, as well as cases where the two are based in different states, the study assures a wide-ranging variety of case studies, thus allowing general speculations on the European design context.

Acknowledging the Design Academy Eindhoven as an educational centre that has heavily contributed to the contemporary design industry, the research builds on a map of case studies covering numerous countries. As shown in Figure 3.18, this investigation results in a broad network of case studies, ranging from the United Kingdom to Germany, from Italy to

Germany, from Austria to The Netherlands and Lebanon, thus providing a broad view on the context.

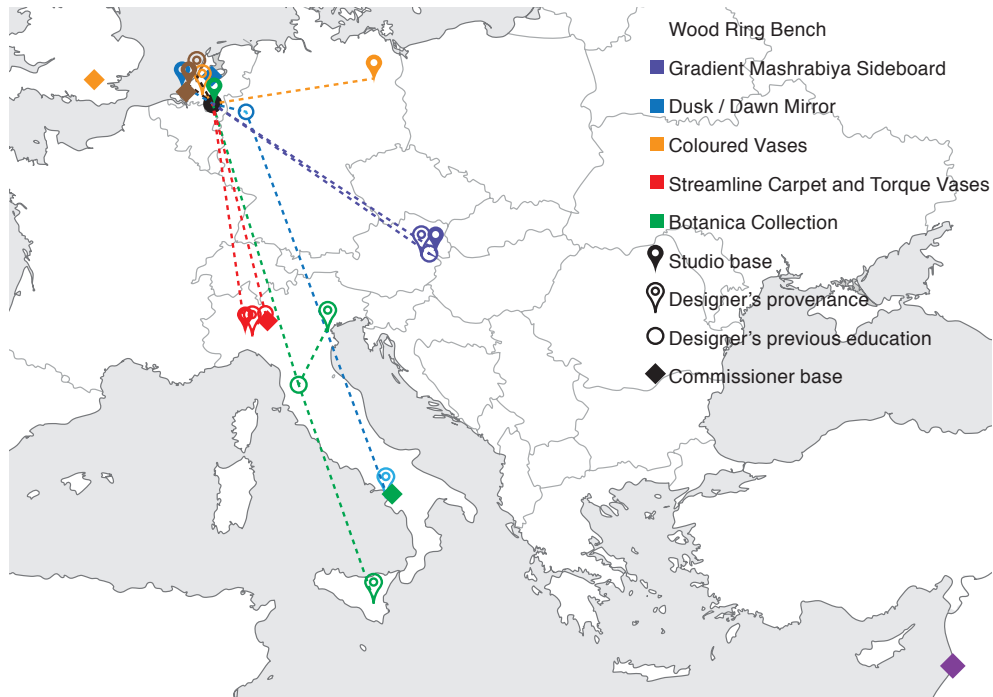


Figure 3.18. A map showing where designers and commissioners are based, as well as where the designers are originally from and where they have been trained

Once the *Designers* and *Commissioners* to include in the research were selected, it was necessary to devise a methodology for engaging with these professionals to gather useful data. The methodology of the main study is described in the next sections.

### 3.3.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The leading research question “*What commodities are traded in the design industry and by whom?*” is synonymous with a variety of objectives ranging from the highlighting of the existing networks between the design and the media industry, to the implicit content of the agreements between the parts involved; from the way reputation is valued and built, to the economic pacts that determine the trade and so on. In a scenario with such variety of areas of interest, semi-structured interviews have been chosen as the main research method. This is mainly due to the flexibility they allow (Morley, 2009). Semi-structured interviews feature predetermined questions, but can easily be adapted according to the way the interviews develop (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Robson, 2002). Robson (2002), describes semi-structured interviews precisely:

*Semi-structured interview has predetermined questions, but the order can be modified based upon the interviewer's perception of what seems most appropriate. Question wording can be changed and explanations given; particular questions, which seem inappropriate with a particular interviewee, can be omitted, or additional ones included. (Robson, 2002: 270)*

Semi-structured interviews can be shaped according to the competencies, confidence and availability of the interviewees, with the result being the eliciting of useful information. While preparing the interviews, it was predictable that some interviewees would have felt more comfortable relaying information on certain aspects, while others would prefer to confide on other aspects of the commission. Additionally, some interviewees would have allowed more time than others for this activity. These variable conditions consolidated the idea of choosing semi-structured interviews as an appropriate adaptive method for data gathering.

While one of the fixed requirements when agreeing upon the interviews was the minimum duration of 30 minutes, it was also decided that the interviews would take place in contexts familiar to the interviewees, preferably their offices. It is in fact believed that familiar contexts would contribute to conducting a more open and honest conversation (Clough and Driver, 1986). Deliberately, no specific order for undertaking interviews with *Commissioners* and *Designers* was planned. The sequence follows the most efficient schedule according to the availability of the interviewees and the budget available for travels and accommodations. As English and Italian are two languages in which the researcher is proficient, the interviewees were given the option of choosing their preferred language between those two. Naturally, the interviews have been recorded and transcribed prior to the analysis and an English translation of the interviews held in Italian is provided only for the parts that are more relevant to the study.

Yin recommends the adoption of multiple-case designs for a better analysis (Yin, 2003: 53–54), so to have a variety of records. Multiple case studies are in fact preferred as opposed to single case studies when analyzing a trend or a rule, rather than a rare occurrence. This suited the aim of the research, hence the decision of adopting a multiple case studies approach. When designing a research based on multiple case studies, Yin makes a distinction between a *replication* and a *contrasting* selection of case studies. Replication occurs when the case studies tend to have the same characteristics and conditions. Conversely, a contrasting logic consists in choosing case studies with opposite characteristics and conditions. For this research, it was necessary that selected case studies would replicate certain aspects concerning the exposure of the selected projects in the media and the limited *Physical Accessibility* of their outcomes. Those key aspects ensure the pertinence of all the case studies to the same niche of design this study focuses on. On the other hand, diversity on some other aspects allowed a broader possibility of generalization while interpreting the data. The inclusion of different typologies of professionals to interview with different nationality, provenance, habitation, age, gender, level of education has introduced the necessary variety to allow generalizations while interpreting the data.

### 3.3.3 UNITS OF ANALYSIS

Once semi-structured interviews had been chosen as the method for gathering the primary data and the sampling of the case studies had been completed, the design of the interview questions had to be undertaken.

Yin (2003: 21–28) suggests that research studies can be broken down to five components in order to better comprehend the process from the aim of the study to the interpretation of the findings. The five components are:

1. The study's question.
2. Its propositions, if any.
3. Its unit(s) of analysis.
4. The logic linking the data to the propositions.
5. The criteria for interpreting the findings.

While the fourth and fifth components are better defined once the data is gathered, outlining the first three components has contributed to the construction of the interview questions. The study's question leading this activity coincided with the research question of the thesis, informed by the existing literature and preliminary studies. This question, reads as "*What commodities are being traded in the design industry, by whom, and how?*"

Yin describes the *propositions of the study* as conjectures or assumptions that suggest what the researcher might want to look at. In this study formal conjectures have not been made, in order to keep an exploratory and open spirit throughout the data collection. However the focus of the research is on the design industry that is most exposed to the spotlights of the media. Therefore the assumption that the media have an impact on the design industry constitutes indeed a proposition that has helped in sampling only case studies with visibility on online and printed magazines or design events. Another implicit proposition is represented by the assumption that a trade of commodities, other than the designed artefacts, occurs in the design industry. As well as the previous proposition, this one also has guided the sampling process, suggesting the selection of commissioned works, thus ensuring the presence of a trade between designer and commissioner in each case study. These two propositions have been supported by the reviewed literature and the preliminary studies.

The *units of analysis* are the single factors that the study aims to observe. While designing the semi-structured interviews, identifying the *units of analysis* is crucial to formulating the questions to ask to the interviewees, so to gather data accountable for the study's question. The *units of analysis* defined by the research aims and objectives are:

1. Actors and Network.
2. Media Profiles and Their Impact.
3. Processes and Trade.



As semi-structured interviews have been chosen for their flexibility, it would have been possible to gather information that does not belong to the three aforementioned units of analysis, which could have helped achieve the main research aim. This information constitutes a fourth unit:

#### 4. General.

Following Collins' indications, the questions of the interviews have been planned *with scope for the respondent to express himself or herself at length* (Collins, 2010: 134). In doing so, the interviews also welcomed anecdotes not directly related to the examined commissions, but coming from the experience of the respondents, as well as general reflections on the design industry. This knowledge further enriched the study. In the following sections each unit of analysis is described, including the consequent questions that have been formulated for the interviews.

### 3.3.3.1 ACTORS AND NETWORK

In academic contexts the terms “actors” and “network” have been heavily associated with the Actor Network Theory of Bruno Latour. However, the way the two terms are used in this study does not relate to the work of the French sociologist. In order to clarify the different interpretation on the terms “actor” and “network”, it is convenient to start from a brief description of Latour's work.

As Bruno Latour admits, the wording Actor Network Theory (see Latour, 1996; 2005) is in many ways inappropriate to the subject it describes. (Avgerou et al., 2004: 62–76; Law and Hassard, 1999) Actor Network Theory in fact does not define a theory, nor a tool, but rather an approach for observations. The approach that Bruno Latour suggests is to follow how information is circulated into systems – whether they are organizations, objects or simply activities – in order to identify single entities that process such information. By proceeding in this way, no distinction is made between the social, technological and natural component of the system, as actors can be anything and anybody operating a “translation”, a transformation between input and output. In this way, he suggests, the research is more likely to overcome conventional categories and the possibility of identifying a net.

Technological changes have allowed a faster, unlimited, production of tangible and intangible outcomes that follow the designed artifact, such as images and their spread on printed and online magazines for example. Such dramatic technological revolutions have contributed to the definition of the current state of the design industry. This aspect has been touched upon in the introduction of this thesis and literature review and it determines an important factor in describing the backdrop for this analysis on the contemporary design industry. However, the collection of the primary data focuses on the sociological aspect of the interaction between commissioners and designers. In fact, the interviews aim to highlight the professionals, group

of people and organizations that the interviewees recall in the conversations. In some cases the mentioned actors play an active role in the process that leads to the final outcomes, some other times they are simple spectators in the process, in some other cases they do not take part in the process leading to the final outcome of the commission, but they do participate in the trading that spins around the commission, or more generally in the design industry. Actors and networks are used in this thesis not in Latour's terms, but simply for their common semantic meaning. Therefore Actors are meant as participants of trade and process, while Network is the structure their interactions form.

Questions investigating the unit of analysis of "Actors and Network" included the following:

- Could you introduce yourself?
- What was your role in the project?
- Who else was involved in the project?

### 3.3.3.2 MEDIA PROFILES AND THEIR IMPACT

The media profile of a design professional or organization is a reflective image constructed through engagement with the media and mediated contexts, such as exhibitions or talks. The media profile is therefore the progeny of media reports and appearances at events (McKeone, 1995). Traditionally the media profile is a prerogative of brands rather than individuals, an exclusive territory eschewing individual personalities. However, with the ubiquitous growth of media in our society, even the general public constructs a media profile and is concerned with its upkeep. Social networking sites, for example, allow the individual to create an account and public profile potentially exposing them to a vast audience never before reachable. In the case of designers, this phenomenon is accentuated by the media attention design has increasingly commanded. Among other objectives, this research investigates how the media profile of both the *Designers* and the *Commissioners* are constructed and what is its impact upon the design industry.

In regards to the second unit of analysis, namely "Media Profiles and Their Impact", pertinent questions included:

- How did you get to know about the designer/commissioner?
- Why did you decide to commission him?
- Why did you accept this commission?
- What qualities define the identity of the commissioner/designer?
- In what ways does the brief/outcome reflect the identity of the commissioner/designer?



### 3.3.3.3 PROCESS AND TRADE

The term *Process*, as used in this study, is connotative of the logic and condition that determines the development of the commission, from its first conception to the dissemination and reception of the final outcome and its representation. The understanding of the trade encompasses the true core of this research. *Trade*, as used here, is broad in meaning, depicting all components of the exchange between two or more entities. *Trade* entails the give-and-take of any tangible or intangible good or service, from economic value, to visibility, prestige, or autonomy.

The unit of analysis of “Process and Trade” has been covered through questions including:

- Did you benefit from this project? How?
- What do you think you offered to the commissioner/designer?
- What did you receive?
- How much autonomy were you given?
- What happened to the designed outcomes?

### 3.3.3.4 GENERAL

Furthermore, some questions were open to answers that could have provided information in more than just one category, or that did not provide information for any of the categories, but that enriched the general knowledge about this particular niche of design. These questions included:

- Where was the outcome presented?
- What media reports do you remember about the project?

Although these additional general questions were asked to all the interviewees, each interview developed in a unique way, adding richness to the totality of the data. In some cases the specificity of the case studies and the interviewees was looked after with ad-hoc questions, prepared for the specific person. For example, to Marco Petroni from Plart, commissioner of the Botanica collection, it has been asked if there is any difference in the way he would write about an art and a design project, as he offers critique for both realms. Chris Kabel, designer of the Wooden Ring Bench, has been solicited about the impact on his practice of MoMA’s acquisition of one of his pieces. These were questions for the specific interviewees and only they could answer them. These questions were asked when they were pertinent to the development of the interview and when time was granted for them. The answers have often enriched the research with extra-data that, when relevant to the aim of the study, was included in the analysis.

### 3.3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

While the sampling of the case studies and the design of the interview questions, constitute the base for the analysis of the data even before they are gathered; the process of data reduction, display, conclusion drawing and verification, forming the data analysis only takes place once the data has been collected (Robson, 2002: 475–476). The analysis of this study's primary data has been undertaken through a process of visualizations and mapping of the information collected, which is described in the next paragraphs. The resulting visualizations are the outcome of a reiterative process of data reduction, display and interpretation. Each interview had generated three graphs:

- One chart concerning the process leading to the completion of the commission.
- One map concerning the trade that took place within the commission.
- One map concerning the trade that takes place in the design industry.

In the next paragraphs of this section each phase of the analytical process is described, with greater attention to the central role of the visualizations.

#### 3.3.4.2 FIRST LEVEL DATA REDUCTION: TRANSCRIPTION AND CODING

After the interviews were recorded, the first step in processing the data was to transcribe the interviews into written text. Transcribing an interview is a good way to first engage with its content; this was one of the reasons leading to the decision of undertaking a word-to-word verbalization of each conversation. Additionally, having the interviews at hand as digital and printed text would facilitate the manipulation of the data, like highlighting, taking notes and so on. Ultimately, the transcribed texts represent a way to grant transparency to anybody examining or studying this research. The transcribed texts, which can be found in the Appendix of this thesis, constitute an archive for readers to track down information and better comprehend the reasoning behind each analytical passage and conclusion. The transcription of the interviews and the following coding process performed a first level of data reduction and, further in the analysis, references are made to the quotes contained in the transcripts by indicating the initials of the interviewee, followed by the time location of the quote on the audio file. For example, a reference to the minute 0:20:34 of Chris Kabel's interview appears as CK0:20:34.

The transcripts of the interviews, once printed have been used as the raw material to be coded. Each transcribed interview has been highlighted with four different colours, one for each units of analysis previously adopted to design the interviews (Actors and Network, Media Profile and Their Impact, Process and Trade, General). Highlighted sentences have then been cut into stripes, so that it would have been easier to manipulate, arrange and find

correlations or patterns amongst each other (Figure 3.19 and 3.20). These stripes of text have then been split into two categories:

- Quotes referred to the commission.
- Quotes relative to broader reflections on the industry or other anecdotes outside of the commissioned project.

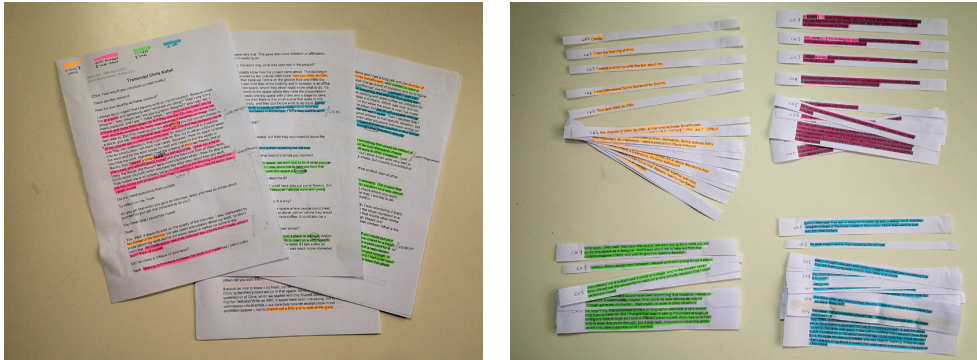


Figure 3.19 and 3.20. Text analysis, highlighting, colour coding, dividing into stripes of text

Within the quotes referred to the commission, it has been possible to discern quotes about the *Process* in undertaking the commission, and quotes about the *Trade* occurring within the actors involved in the commission. Among the quotes relative to broader reflections on the industry, the relevant information was referring only to the *Trade* occurring in the design industry. At this point, a process of categorization, display and analysis has been undertaken, leading to a system of visualizations composed of charts and maps. This process is described in the following section.

### 3.3.4.2 REDUCTION, DISPLAY AND ANALYSIS

Miles and Huberman, cited by Robson (2002: 475), describe data display as an effective way for data reduction. Yin, instead, illustrates how visual graphs can be useful to detect patterns during the analysis phase (2003: 26–27). The confrontation of patterns, conventionally named as *pattern matching*, is then a way to assess internal validity to the study analysis (Yin, 2003: 116–120). Visualizing data is therefore an operation that has an impact on reducing and understanding the data, as well as suggesting and validating possible interpretations. In his book “The Functional Art”, information graphics and visualization expert Alberto Cairo (2013) describes the twofold role of visualizations:

*“every visualization has a presentation and an exploration component: they present, but they also facilitate the analysis of what they show, to different degrees.”* (Cairo 2013: xvi)

As data were collected, transcribed and coded, the need of visualizing the information became more compelling. In this study, the generated maps and charts have not been conceived as a way of representing the discoveries. In fact, when working on those visuals, there were no

discoveries yet, but rather a complex mass of information to untangle. These visualizations would at times make evident the necessity for a reduction of the data being taken into account; whilst at other times they were suggesting potential interpretations. The criteria adopted to visually design the graphs and charts in the thesis influenced, and in some cases even dictated, operations of data filtering, thus becoming an integral part of the methodology of analysis (Yau, 2013).

As seen in the previous section, information had been separated between quotes concerning the design industry and quotes about the selected commission. This last group of quotes was further divided between quotes concerning the process and quotes concerning the trade, while the relevant quotes about the design industry were only concerned with trade. In order to visualize and analyze the information about the process and the trade, two distinct visual tools have been primed. For the process, a chart has been identified as the most effective tool to visualize and analyze how commissions unfolded; while for the trade, a map has been used to track exchange among key actors. In the following section the two tools are described.

### 3.3.4.3 PROCESS CHARTS AND TRADE MAPS

In describing the visualization process, it is important to make a distinction between the two typologies of graphs:

- Charts illustrating the *Process* starting from the conception of the commission to its completion and consumption. These charts will be called *Process Charts* from now on.
- Maps of the *Trade* occurring in the context of the commission, and more generally in the design industry. These maps will be referred to as *Commission Trade Map* and *General Trade Map*, respectively from now on.

*Process Charts* have been realized following these steps:

1. Create a Cartesian diagram where the horizontal axis represents time, divided among *Commission*, *Design*, *Production*, *Distribution* and *Consumption*. These five phases are derived from the design process as described by Ulrich and Eppinger (Ulrich and Eppinger, 2004). On the vertical axis are disposed the three by-products the commission has generated, namely the *Piece*, *Display* and *Image* (Figure 3.21).
2. Highlight in the transcript all the parts that describe the process of the commission as seen from the interviewee.
3. Insert all the quotes about design process in the graph.
4. Organize the quotes among the right quadrants of the graph (i.e., if they talk about somebody sitting on the chair, that quote will be placed in the *Consumption-Piece* quadrant). Quotes can also go across multiple

quadrants if they are related to more phases of the process, or to more than one outcome (i.e., *Piece* and *Display*)

PIECE DISPLAY IMAGE					
	COMMISSION	DESIGN	PRODUCTION	DISTRIBUTION	CONSUMPTION

Figure 3.21. Template of the Process Chart, where quotes from the interviews will be placed according to the type of information they contain.

By analyzing the transcripts for what concerns the trade occurring in the commission and generally in the design industry, seven categories of actors taking part in the trade and five categories of commodities emerged.

The seven typologies of actors are:

- *Designers*. They are the sampled designers that undertook the selected commissions.
- *Commissioners*. They are the sampled commissioners that instigated the selected projects.
- *Agents of Media Profile*. They are media-representatives or hosts of events. Here we find journalists, editors, critics, events and their organizers, etc.
- *Enablers*. They are the ones that back the designers to make the project happen by contributing with technical, economical or creative support. This category includes, sponsors, craftsmen and producers, collaborators of sort. Colloquially they can also be referred to as “backers”.
- *Clients*. They usually are sellers or borrowers of the designed artefacts. They can be collectors or museums purchasing the designer’s work, galleries distributing the work of the designers, brands who produce and sell the designer’s works once these are completed. *Clients* differ from *Commissioners* as they are restricted to those that come in after the commission has been contracted.

- *Other Creatives*. They can be artists or designers mentioned by the interviewees.
- *Schools*. They are the educational institutes mentioned in the interviews.

The actors mentioned in the interviews are positioned in the categories according to the role given by the interviewees. This means that if the actor “Museum” is mentioned for its purchase of the designer’s creation, but no reference is made to the fact that it exhibits the work, then the actor “museum” falls in the *Client* category, and not among *Agents of Media-Profile*, as one might expect. Each category of actors has been assigned a colour and a position in the map.

The five categories of commodities traded among actors that emerged from the interviews are:

- *Autonomy*, intended as one’s granted independence to decide and act.
- *Visibility*, which is the prominence to an audience.
- *Reputation*, the trade of reputation implies someone’s benefit in terms of status.
- *Financial Value*, as economic advantage.
- *Personal Reward*, one’s satisfaction or gratification on a personal level.

These categories of commodities that emerged from a first analysis of the transcripts, to some extent were also validated by the literature previously reviewed. Design history highlights the topic of *Autonomy*. Designers of the past responded to political intentions of their countries and to the economic blooming of mass production and consumerism. The review on the current state depicts a design that is free from central powers, but more complex and fragmented for what concerns the relations amongst actors. Therefore relations of dependence or autonomy are harder to detect, and harder also to understand what determines these. Cultural Studies and the observations on the current state of the design industry put in evidence the role of the media and the intangible values that are associated with artefacts and their authors. Therefore *Visibility* and *Reputation* emerge as key factors for understanding the current design industry. More in general, *Financial Value* remains a common currency for obtaining someone’s services and efforts and it is therefore an element to keep in consideration. Finally, the *Personal Reward* that a professional feels while doing his or her work or when accomplishing some achievements is a necessary combustible in a hectic industry like the one of design described in this thesis. Especially when it is in discussion with the social and cultural roles of one’s practice.

*General Trade Maps* and *Commission Trade Maps* have been realized following this process:

1. Highlight in the transcript all the parts that provide information about *Trade*;
2. Make a list of actors that are mentioned in the interview.
3. Separate the actors that are involved in the selected commission and the

- ones that are mentioned in regard to general reflections about the industry.
4. Divide the actors' names among *Designers, Commissioners, Agents of Media-profile, Enablers, Clients, Other Creatives, Schools* and distribute them on the sheet.
  5. Choose the font size for each actor according to their degree of involvement in the *Trade*.
  6. Connect actors that are trading with each other through an arrow directed towards the receiver of the traded commodity.
  7. Colour the arrows according to the type of commodity that is being traded. Sometimes, quotes from the interviews would suggest the exchange of more than one of the commodities above. This was acknowledged and indicated in the map as two separate arrows of different colours.
  8. Note a time code on the arrow so that a reader can track the quote back in the transcript. In the transcript, add the same time label next to the quote. Initially, quotes were copied on the arrows (Figure 3.22 and 3.23), later it has been found more convenient to indicate them simply with the time code and initials of the interviewee.
  9. If the interviewee highlights more than once the exchange of the same commodity between two actors, thicken the arrow.

A template of the *Trade Map* is shown in Figure 3.24.

The proposed procedure has proved itself particularly effective in organizing information and detecting the actors and networks of each commission and generally in the design industry, playing a role in both process and trade. By applying the process described above, some data had to be filtered, so to make the visualization comprehensible. For the same reason hierarchies had to be found and information interpreted, especially when identifying the traded commodities. This is why visualizations have played a role in reducing, displaying and analyzing the data. In the next paragraph it is described how they also facilitated a triangulation, thus strengthening the validity of the research methodology.



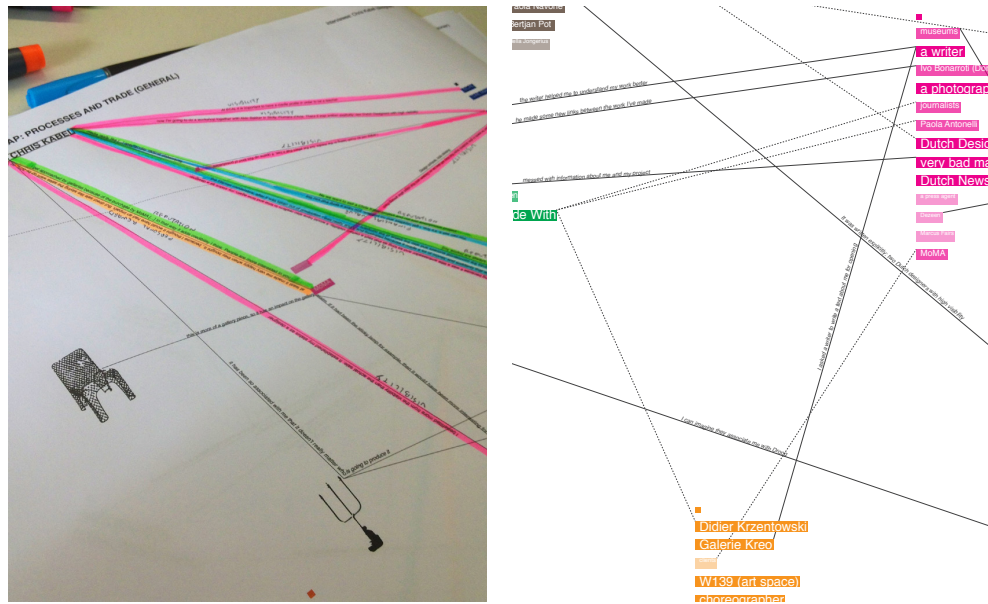


Figure 3.22 and 3.23. Earlier versions of the Trade Maps, in which quotes were copied on the arrows. Later these quotes have been replaced by time codes and arrows have been coloured according to the commodity they indicate

### 3.3.4.3 VALIDITY: TRIANGULATION

Arksey and Knight (1999) have described at length triangulation as a strategy that serves two main purposes: *confirmation and completeness* (pp. 21–31). This study adopts a *data source triangulation* as the methodology for gathering the primary data is represented solely by the semi-structured interviews (Yin, 2003: 98–99). However, the source involved the two different groups of *Commissioners* and *Designers*, therefore offering two different, and in some ways, opposite sources. Additionally, time and space are also two factors that have changed among all the interviews, as they were not being conducted simultaneously in the same location, but rather individually, at different times and locations.

Apart from data gathering, triangulation across case studies has also been adopted for identifying relevant findings. Visualizations have been crucial in validating the analysis, as they allowed a relatively quick and simple way of comparing and merging the data. On software for graphic design, all the visualizations could be laid upon the other so to sum and confront the information deriving from the interviews within and among each case study. This triangulation has made an informed interpretation of the data possible to come to relevant observations and findings, illustrated in Chapter 5 and 6.



## 3.4 SUMMARY

This chapter has described the way preliminary studies have been conducted and how they have informed the methodology for the main study.

The main study is represented by semi-structured interviews. By definition, semi-structured interviews allow the necessary flexibility to tap into the broad context this research focuses on, as it can be the impact of the media on the design industry of limited editions and one-offs.

The chapter has also described the criteria for the sampling of the interviewees. These are *Designers* and their *Commissioners*, relating about a specific commission. However, freedom has been granted to them to speak and reflect about other experiences as well, so that more useful information could have been gathered.

The semi-structured interviews have been planned so to reveal information about the process and trade occurring in this niche of design, besides the actors who populate it and their roles. Seven categories of actors have been identified (*Designers, Commissioners, Clients, Enablers, Agents of Media Profile, Other Creatives, Schools*). Also the trade of five types of commodities have been observed (*Autonomy, Visibility, Reputation, Financial Value, Personal Reward*).

Once data had been gathered, the analysis took place with the use of visualizations. The role of the visualizations, as explained in this chapter, has been one of helping the reduction and display of the data. This has been helpful in organizing and interpreting the information, drawing direct connections between the analysis and the raw data. The process of visualizing data generated for each interview one chart representing the process through which each commission developed. Additionally, each interview resulted in one map describing the trade within the commission and one map describing the trade that takes place generally in the design industry.

The *Process Charts* and *Trade Maps* have been included in the six case studies described at length in Chapter 5. Then the same charts and maps have been merged and compared so to arrive to the findings illustrated in Chapter 6.

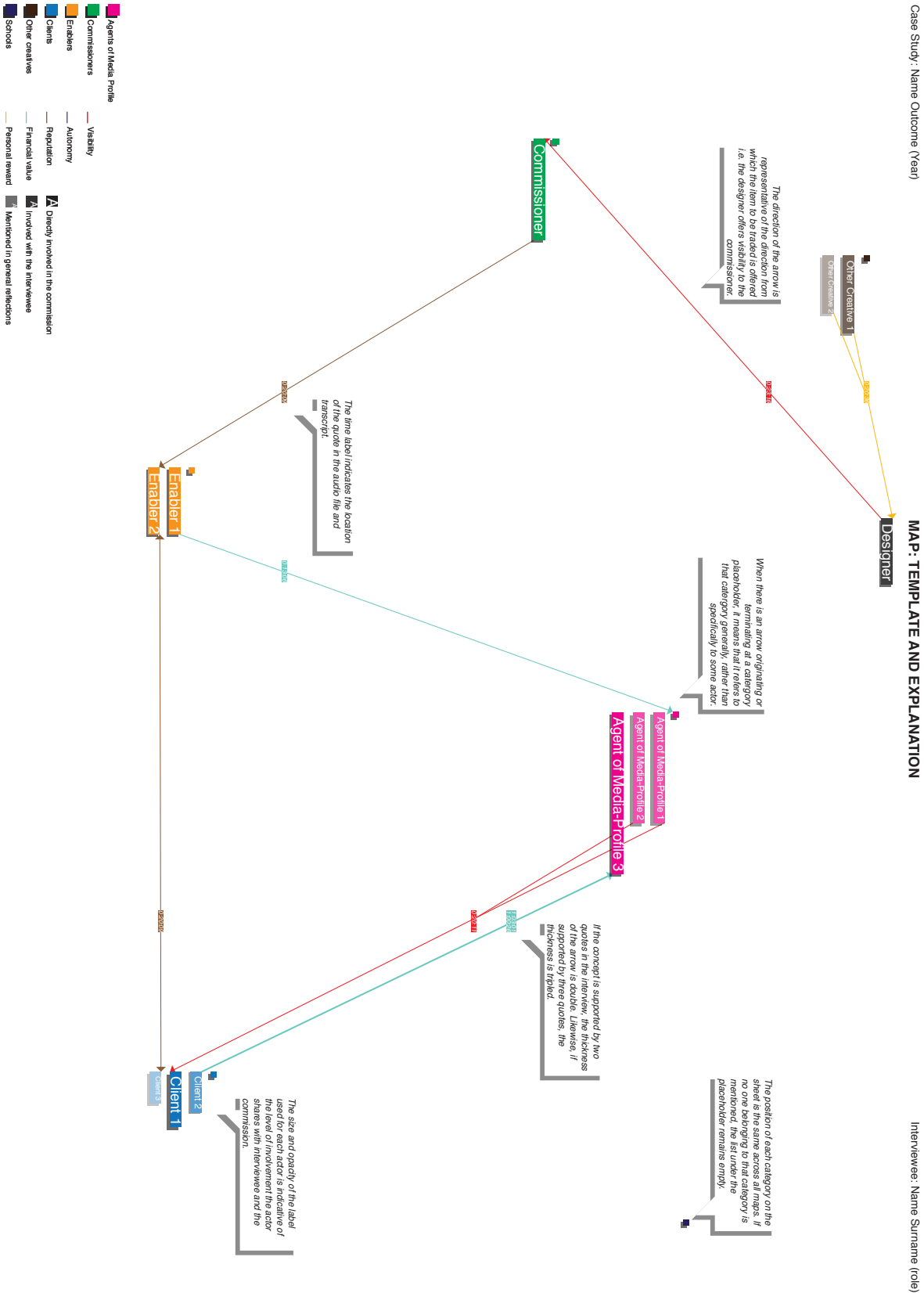


Figure 3.24.  
Template and Explanation of a Trade Map



## **CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDIES**



## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the six case studies of the main study are presented. The data gathered from each interview is displayed according to the methods described in Chapter 3. Therefore, while the verbal analysis untangles the collected information and guides the reader through it, the *Process Charts* and *Trade Maps* visualize the design process and the trade described by the interviewees. These visuals allow also the tracking of the information in the transcripts as time coded labels are included. Each case study presents the information about the process that generated the designed *Pieces*, their *Display* and their *Image*. Subsequently, attention is given to the trade that has taken place around each project and more generally in the design industry, according to the previously identified commodities of *Autonomy*, *Financial Value*, *Visibility*, *Reputation* and *Personal Reward*.

In order to analyse the commissions from beginning to end, it is suggested that it be observed through the traditional phases of the design process (Ulrich and Eppinger, 2004). By distributing all the useful quotes from the interviews in the *Process Chart* described in the methodology chapter, it is possible to observe the sequence of *Commission*, *Design*, *Production*, *Distribution* and *Consumption* of the *Piece* as well as its *Image* and its *Display*. As the designed artefacts exist in the form of products, exhibition pieces and pictures in the media, each of the three forms has gone through an interrelated process. In this chapter it is described how the interviewees reflect on the process of the selected commission they have been involved in and the resulting outcomes.

Furthermore, each interviewee has been invited to reflect on the trade occurring in the commission and more generally in the design industry. All the related information have been filtered and visualized as described in the methodology chapter. In this chapter such visualizations are included while verbal transcripts, opportunely indexed with the adopted coding system, are to be found in the Appendix.

## 4.2 CASE STUDY 1: WOOD RING BENCH BY CHRIS KABEL COMMISSIONED BY WITTE DE WITH AND TENT

Born in 1975, Chris Kabel is a Dutch designer; a graduate of the Design Academy Eindhoven class of 2001 and currently based in Rotterdam. While his graduation project – the Sticky Lamp, a light bulb whose adhesive packaging functions as a moveable wall support – has made it to main design fairs and magazines, his Mesh Chair, designed in 2009 has been acquired in the permanent collection of MoMA New York (Chriskabel.com, 2013). These and other projects like the Flame chandelier (Moooi, 2003) and the Umbrella Shady Lace (Droog, 2004) have contributed to build and establish Chris Kabel's media profile.

Witte de With and Tent are both cultural institutions for the promotion and exhibition of contemporary art in Rotterdam; with the former providing a view on the international art scene and the latter focused on the Dutch community. The two institutions share the same building in the centre of Rotterdam and every year since 2008 they have commissioned a selected local designer to propose an installation for their mutual area on the first floor of the building. This on-going series of annual projects is called “Shared Space”. Mariette Dölle, interviewed as commissioner for this case study, is the program director of Tent and is the person that has initiated and managed the “Shared Space” series.

The Wooden Ring Bench, designed by Chris Kabel and presented in 2010, represents the third episode of the “Shared Space” series (Figure 4.01). On his website, Chris Kabel describes the Wooden Ring Bench with these words:

*A 10 meter long massive wood beam is cut up in a hundred tapered pieces that, when put together, make a circular bench. A metal band clamps the pieces together without glue. Because the bench is made out of one solid beam the wood grain continues along the bench. (Chriskabel.com, 2013)*

The piece was exhibited at the Witte de With and Tent space, before travelling to other exhibitions and events. Two artist's proofs, two prototypes and an edition of eight pieces, were originated from the Bench designed for this commission. The Wood Ring Bench has been a finalist for the Dutch Design Awards 2011 and has been featured in most main design magazines and websites the likes of Domus, Abitare, Dezeen.com and Designboom.com.

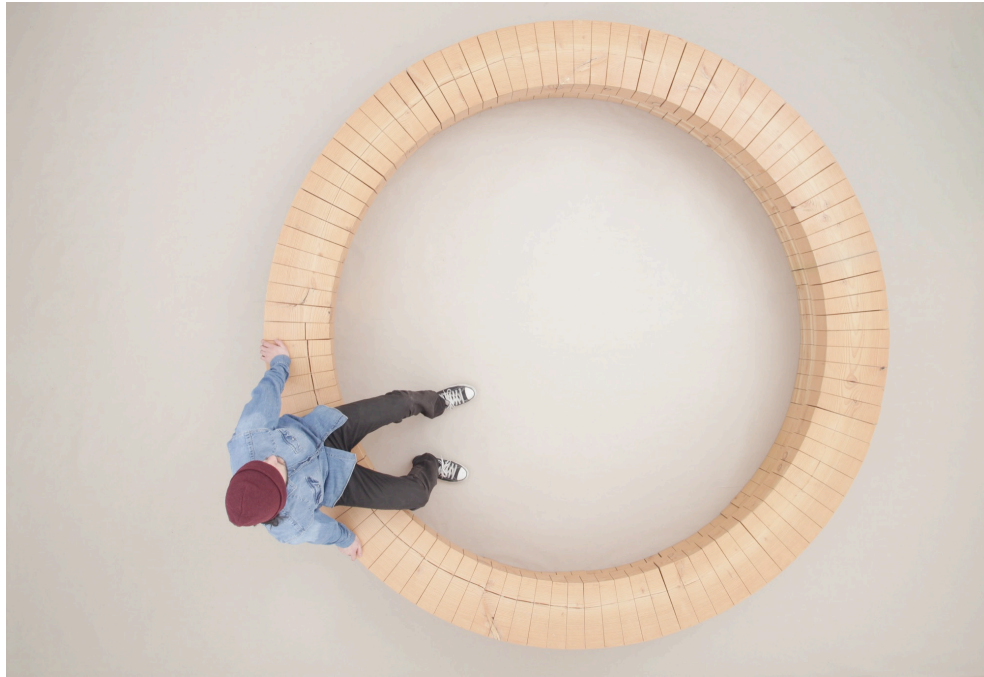


Figure 4.01. The Wood Ring Bench by Chris Kabel

## 4.2.1 CASE STUDY 1: ANALYSIS

This case study depicts the coming together of art institutions Tent and Witte de With, and local designer Chris Kabel through a commission to provisionally occupy a space in the institutions' building.

Chris Kabel first approaches this commission by trying to deliver something functionally useful for the *Commissioner*. He organizes meetings with the director of Witte de With to identify issues to tackle and work on possible functional solutions. However, Mariette Dölle, the person managing this commission, pushes him to think independently, because the value of the project lays in the interpretation, the freethinking of the *Designer*. It was only when Chris Kabel acknowledged the “150% autonomy” that was allowed to him that he could come to the proposal of the Wood Ring Bench (MD0:22:09).

Nevertheless *Autonomy* is not only to be found in the research and design process that Chris Kabel adopts to generate the designed piece. *Autonomy* is granted by Witte de With and Tent to Chris Kabel also in the management, development and trading of the artifact after this was presented (MD0:22:21). Such freedom allows Chris Kabel to think strategically. In fact, by trying to follow the requests of the director of the institution, Chris realized that he was “just solving his problems”(CK0:08:58) by making a “really tailor made solution for this place, [that] will probably end up somewhere in the storage and nobody will see it again”(CK0:09:31). Instead, he decides to design something “that could be sold afterwards



*maybe through galleries, or maybe that could just work in other situations*”(CK0:09:30). The resulting Wood Ring Bench is a circular seat defining two spaces within the same room. This characteristic allows any user to be either inside or outside, looking for exclusion or inclusion, intimacy or sharing. The proposal of designer Chris Kabel is the consequence of his interpretation of the broad brief about sharing a space, as well as of his strategy to later exploit the commercial potential of this commission through his network of galleries. Of these galleries, Kreo decided to invest in the Wood Ring Bench and make it available in an edition of ten (Chriskabel.com). Thanks to his foresight and the fact that Witte de With and Tent never requested a percentage of the profit for any further sale of the piece, Chris Kabel was able to profit economically from the commission (CK0:16:50, MD0:22:21, MD0:22:40).

As the interviews with Chris Kabel and Mariette Dölle unfold, our conversations about design process and trade gradually move from the bench as an artifact, to its *Image*. Once the project was perfected, it had to be photographed for documentation and communication purposes. Mariette Dölle solicited a photographer she is used to work with to take portraits of the Wood Ring Bench (MD0:35:24). Unsatisfied with the result, Chris Kabel decides to capture the bench himself. He invests in a camera and a lens and finally achieves the desired result: a top view of the Wood Ring Bench (CK0:13:50). In the interview Mariette Dölle comments that the picture is unrealistic because it is a perspective that no one will ever have under normal circumstances (MD0:36:46). She observes that for Chris Kabel it is important to highlight the iconic figure of the artefact and not to create portraiture (MD0:36:46). She states that the pictures are part of Chris Kabel’s design rather than mere documentation (MD0:35:01). Mariette Dölle is probably right; once again Chris Kabel has made decisions strategically. He says those pictures from Witte de With and Tent were not *“selling the project enough”* (CK0:13:15). Chris Kabel is aware of the necessity of circulating the project in the media and in doing so he has to present the project in the most *“precise”* way (CK0:13:50). The commissioner seconds his wishes and the image successfully spreads in the design media. As a *“distribution of design”* (MD0:35:22) Witte de With and Tent print a number of postcards featuring the picture taken by Chris Kabel (Figure 4.02). The designer uses the postcard to network with his contacts, like Paola Antonelli of MoMA. Also as a *Display* the Wood Ring Bench is rather successful, being featured during the Dutch Design Week in Eindhoven and of course at Galerie Kreo in Paris, as well as in other venues in Amsterdam among other places.

Chris Kabel is informally requested to credit Witte de With and Tent as commissioners when the Wood Ring Bench is exhibited or published and certainly the credit is a way to tie the name of the institution with the bench. This denotes an interest in circulating both institutions’ names in festivals and media. The Wood Ring bench represents a tool to achieve *Visibility* for both its designer Chris Kabel and the commissioners Witte de With and Tent. Mariette Dölle admits that Witte de With and Tent value the publications about works they have supported. These publications, to some extent represent a measure for success (MD0:42:14, MD0:23:16). When Mariette Dölle speaks in general terms about how public

funds are distributed, she polemically observes how the Dutch government thinks *Designers* can access a broad audience, unlike artists (MD0:11:14). Although a comparison between the reach of art and design is hard to make, it is certain that Chris Kabel successfully spread the project through his network of journalists, curators, educators and galleries (CK0:21:58). Without such commission Chris Kabel would miss the opportunity to feed his media profile (CK0:28:00).

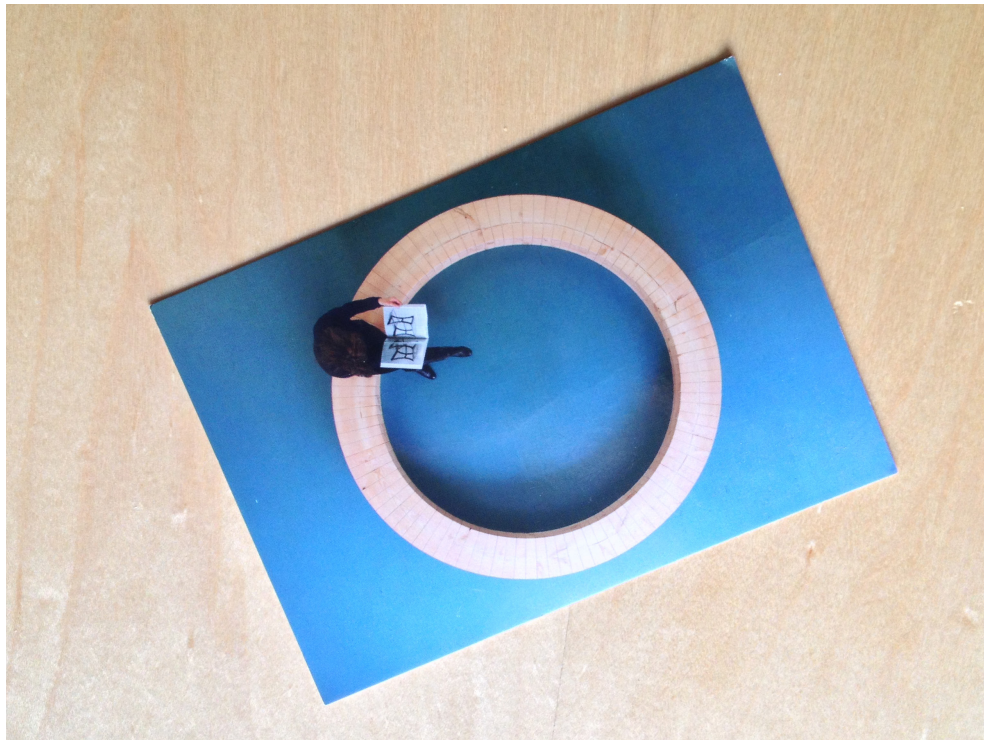


Figure 4.02. The postcard printed by Witte de With and Tent featuring the photograph taken by Chris Kabel

Chris Kabel does not particularly like populating magazines and events as a source for *Visibility*. Yet he knows that it is a necessary skill for a designer to develop in order to get more opportunities (CK0:43:18), whether these are new commissioned designs or an involvement in design education (CK0:42:56). Reflecting on this aspect of his profession, Chris Kabel says:

*“I don’t like being in the media, but the opportunities that opens”*  
(CK0:43:18).

In fact Chris Kabel had then just been assigned to give some workshops in Sicily, and he is sure that such opportunity could only happen because of his popularity on the media.

*Visibility* emerges in our conversation as something that is necessary to make a designer attractive to commissioners. Chris Kabel explains that some of his previous products had been successful in their circulation on the media, thus putting him on the map of design

(CK0:28:00). The designed artefacts are indeed “*little ambassadors*” (CK0:25:34) for the *Designer*, the most efficient way to make the *Designer*’s name circulate in media and events and obtain the necessary *Visibility* (CK0:25:34, CK1:02:04, CK1:02:03). The media profile of a *Designer* is an important factor in the relationship between *Designer* and *Commissioner* in the design industry. Chris Kabel reflects on how ordinary objects become special only when they carry with them the name of popular authors, and this is not only to achieve better sales, but also to raise the profile of the commissioning company (CK0:39:13). The anecdote that Chris Kabel tells about a lamp he designed for a Japanese lighting company is explicatory of the interest of the industry for the *Designer*’s name rather than merely for his or her design skills. After a first prototype of the lamp was produced, Chris Kabel asked the Japanese company for some substantial changes (CK0:38:26). The company could not afford to make the suggested changes, so Chris Kabel – who was fine with the product going into production – requested that the piece would not feature his name. The Japanese company could not see the sense of distributing the lamp without Chris Kabel’s name on it as the association between the designer’s name and the company brand would have been the key point of the project. This little incident is symbolic for the crucial value of a *Designer*’s name in the design industry.

*Visibility* does not only mean bringing the *Designer*’s or the *Commissioner*’s name under the spotlight, there is also a *Visibility* that anonymously brings the *Designer*’s work into people’s world, beyond the design realm. That is, when images of the artifact are featured in non-design media or non-design events; where people experience the representation of the piece without even realizing that what they are looking might be a relevant piece for the design community. It is exactly this kind of *Visibility* that results in a *Personal Reward* for Chris Kabel the most. This the case when Chris Kabel explains his satisfaction when seeing the postcard of the bench casually appearing in the background of a picture in a popular newspaper (CK0:30:00). It is an almost utilitarian perspective on *Visibility* that Chris Kabel offers when he describes the way his designs enters people’s lives, whether this happens directly through the object or through its representation (CK0:30:38).

## 4.2.2 CASE STUDY 1: SUMMARY

This case study describes the process and trade occurring in the commission initiated by Rotterdam based art institutions Tent and Witte de With for local designer Chris Kabel. The commission is part of the program “Shared Space” in which a local designer is asked to take on a public room in the building hosting the art institutions. The commission is open to any outcome. After a few attempts to meet the commissioner’s needs, Chris Kabel acknowledges the complete *Autonomy* he has been given and proposes the Wood Ring Bench. A wooden circular bench that he strategically proposes to galleries he is in touch with, among these Galerie Kreo of Paris decides to turn the piece into a limited series to sell to customers. Communication wise, Chris Kabel’s attention to design, produce and distribute the desired

image of the project is evident, particularly after he rejects the photographs proposed by the commissioner and decides to produce his own. His careful decisions resulted in a successful project in terms of sales, but also in terms of *Visibility*. The association of an art institution with a *Designer* for Mariette Dölle – as the commissioner – is beneficial for the *Reputation* of the *Designer* and for the *Financial Value* of his work. Similarly, Chris Kabel understands how a *Designer*, when commissioned, is trading much more than his or her design skills. This is reflected in his experience with a Japanese lighting manufacturer to whom he proposed the placing of a product he designed into circulation without his name attached to it. The manufacturer's subsequent refusal highlighted the importance of a *Designer's* name in the design industry. In conclusion, while Chris Kabel muses on the opportunities that arose from his presence on the media, he also sees his products having a life of their own in the mediated contexts and entering into people's lives as images.



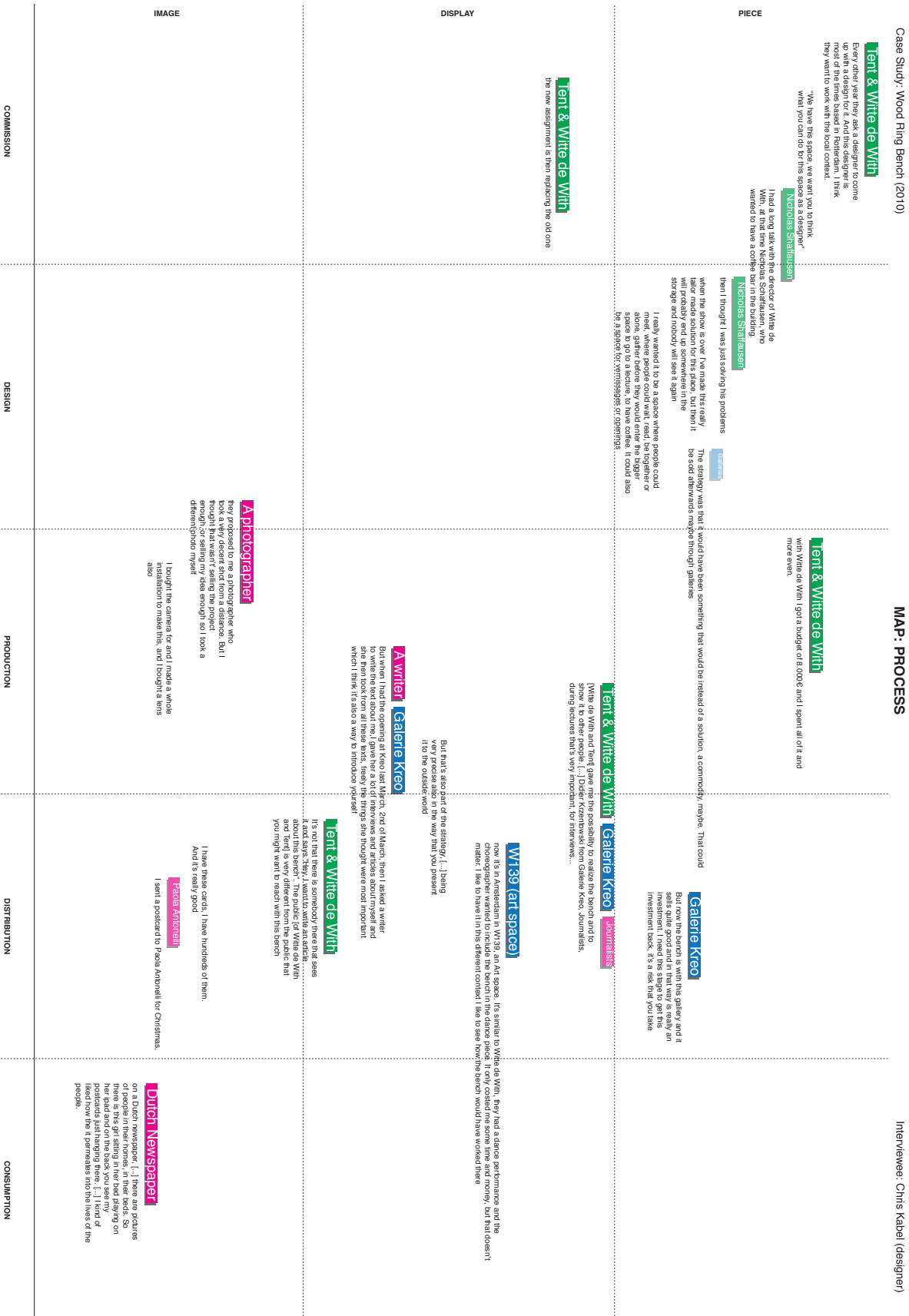


Figure 4.03.  
Process Chart - Case Study 1 - Interviewee Chris Kabel

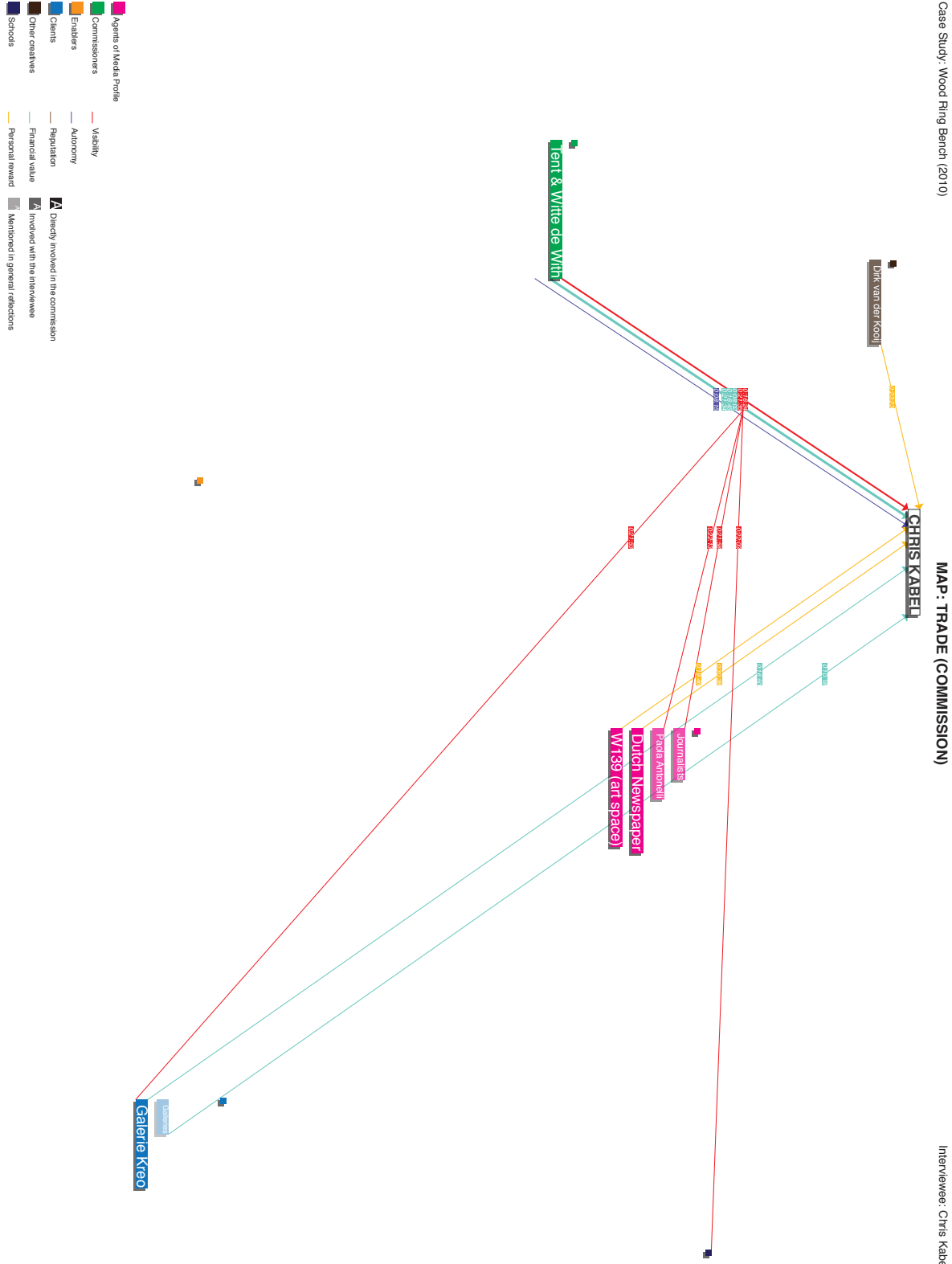


Figure 4.04  
Commission Trade Map - Case Study 1 - Interviewee Chris Kabel





MAP: PROCESS				Interviewee: Mariëtte Dolle for Tent (commissioner)
Case Study: Wood Ring Bench (2010)				
<b>Nicholas Staflaasen</b> Together with the director of MHA de Wit, Nicholas Staflaasen decided that we would have liked to start what we call a research project titled "Shared space", in which we would ask others, to tell us what the space was or was about.				
PIECE	It would have been interesting, not to commission visual artists [...], but to branch out a little and to look at the great community of designers that are based in Rotterdam.  I consider this commission a form of fundamental research.  To work on a concept that it's not about display, but it's about use: use of spaces, use of objects, use of furniture.			
	<b>Chris Kabel</b> He really, as a true artist in his own right, included me in the commission. This is what I needed. I needed him. I want to propose. Take it or leave it!"			
DISPLAY	<b>A photographer</b> So I had my photographer and my photographer took a number of pictures of the space and how the bench was used in the space.  I wanted to show the space of Tent and Witte de With in a recognizable way.  <b>Chris Kabel</b> to bring across these iconic quality of a tree in a perfect circle, he made and distributed a picture that is in a way a non-realistic picture. Therefore this is not a documentary picture, but it's about framing and indeed this is to me part of the design.  <b>A photographer</b> <b>Chris Kabel</b> These pictures were not approved by the artists.			
	<b>Chris Kabel</b> What Chris was interested in was framing. How to show the iconic quality of the Wooden Ring.  It's part of the design. I can say it freely. I'll show you why, because this image, it's what we would say an iconic image.			
COMMISSION		<b>Chris Kabel</b> The image taken by Chris became our communication picture.  We completely know who stands what and to whom.		
DESIGN		<b>Dutch Design Week</b> <b>Galerie Kreo</b> (the fact that the piece has been exhibited at the Dutch Design Week, Galerie Kreo, means) We are able to commission a work that became quite a crucial work for Chris Kabel. So we were at the right time, right place.  It has been one of the most successful episodes and I think it has to do with the fact that it's a project that can be transcribed to other places.		
PRODUCTION		<b>Chris Kabel</b> I believe we have been successful because within few weeks the Wooden Ring became quite well known.  Tent and Witte de With always make postcards for the audience to take away [...], that's also an idea of distribution of design.  We are happy to have more audience, also when we have a great designer like Chris with an amazing project we go out of our way to let people know, to let the press know, to let our audience know.		
			CONSUMPTION	

Figure 4.06  
Process Chart - Case Study 1 - Interviewee Mariëtte Dolle

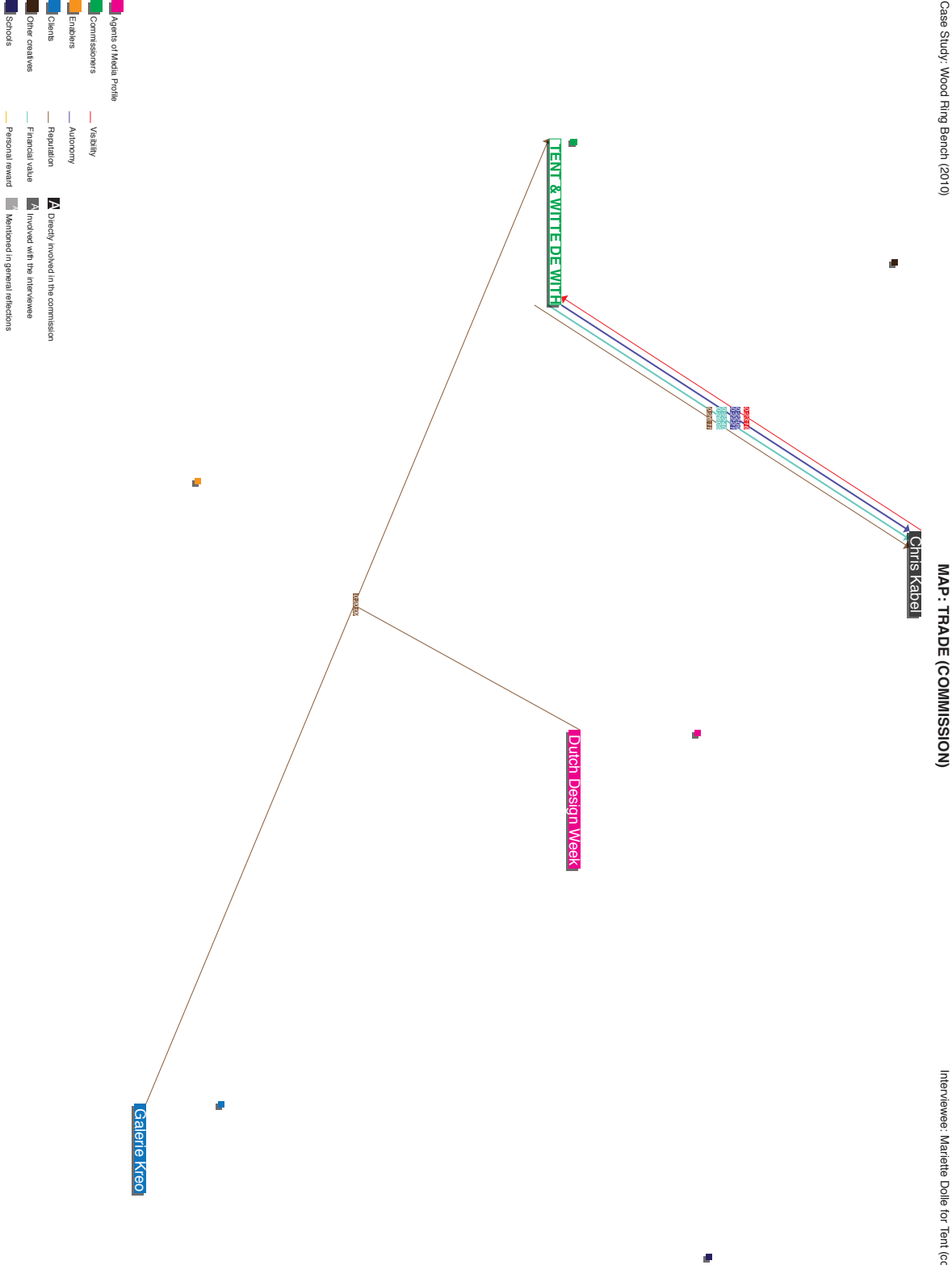


Figure 4.07.  
Commission Trade Map - Case Study 1 - Interviewee Mariëtte Dolle

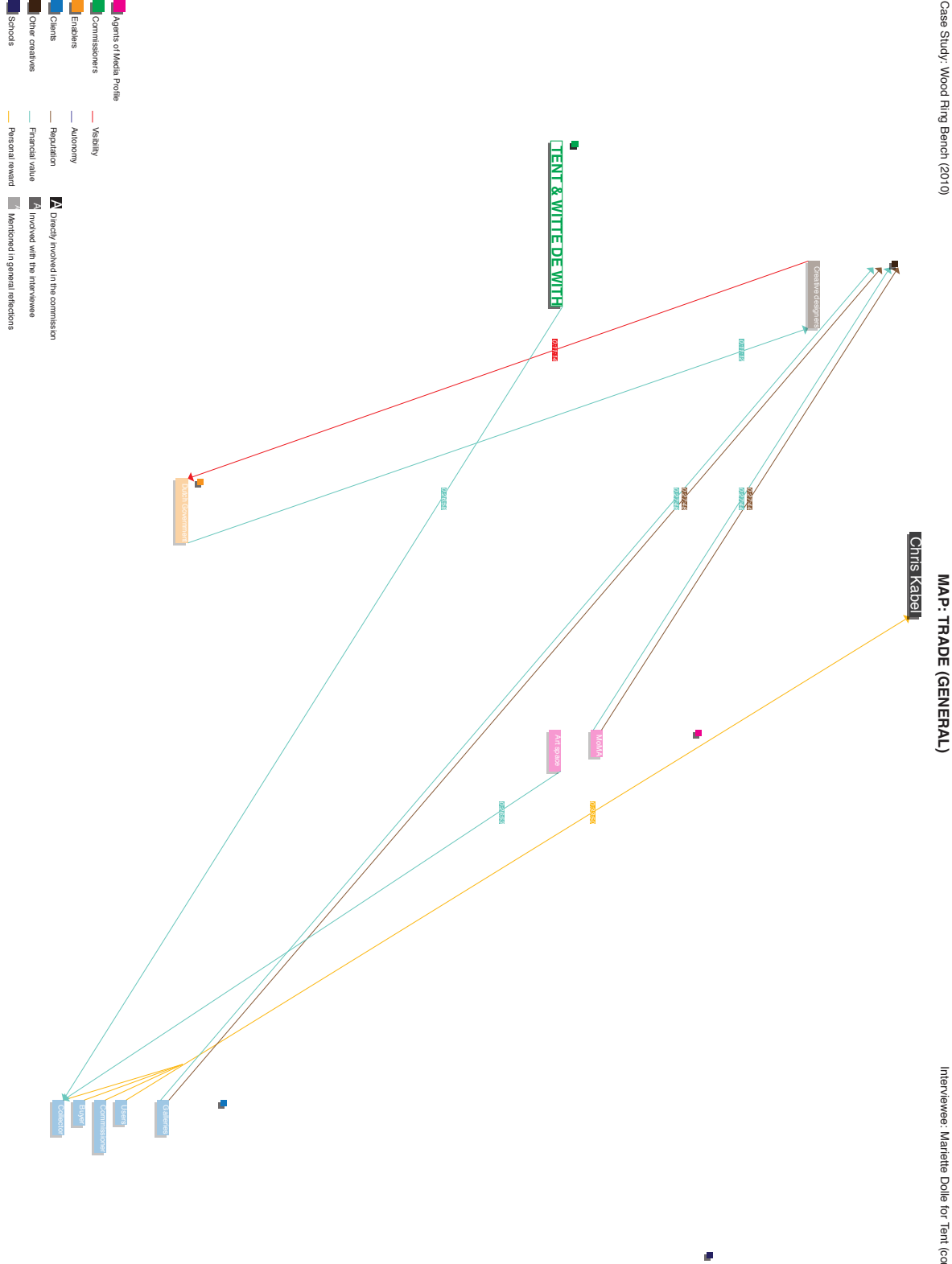


Figure 408.  
General Trade Map - Case Study 1 - Interviewee Mariette Dölle

## 4.3 CASE STUDY 2: GRADIENT MASHRABIYA SIDEBOARD BY STUDIO MISCHER'TRAXLER COMMISSIONED BY CARWAN GALLERY

Based in Vienna, studio Mischer'Traxler was founded by Austrian designers Katharina Mischer (1982) and Thomas Traxler (1981) in 2008. Both Katharina Mischer and Thomas Traxler had previously completed master degrees in design at Design Academy Eindhoven, graduating in 2008. Since its inception, studio Mischer'Traxler has worked on a number of projects ranging from furniture to installations for exhibitions and from jewelry to tableware. Their attention has always been on the production methods and conceptual thinking supporting the design. The number of awards they have won (i.e., the Austrian Experimental Design Award 2009, the DMY Award 2009 and the W-hotels Designer of the Future Award 2011), their participation in exhibitions at prestigious venues and festivals (i.e., the Boijmans van Boiningen, the Design Museum London and the Triennale Milano) and the acquisitions by museums' collections (i.e., the Art institute Chicago and the MAK Vienna) together with publication on design and non-design websites and magazines, define their media profile (mischertraxler.com, 2013).

Carwan Gallery has been funded by architects Pascal Wakim (Lebanon) and Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte (Canada) in 2010. Carwan Gallery does not inhabit a permanent physical space but hosts exhibitions at most main fairs of contemporary art and design in Europe and Middle East. One of the gallery's characteristics is that it combines European and Middle-eastern designers, architects, artists and craftsman in order to produce limited editions of artefacts (carwangallery.com, 2013).

The Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard designed by studio Mischer'Traxler for Carwan Gallery in 2012 has been produced in an edition of ten pieces and two artist's proofs (Figure 4.09). On both the websites of commissioner and designers, the description of the Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard reads:

*Studio mischer'traxler teamed up with an expert woodworker in Lebanon to redefine the constructive system of the traditional mashrabiyas: delicate wooden window screens often found in Middle Eastern architecture. Inspired by the process of lathing the small wooden parts for mashrabiyas, mischer'traxler focused on exposing the many steps of production, to make*

*the craftsmen's work visible and understandable to the observer. The result "a sideboard" is composed of a network of more than 650 distinct pieces of manually carved wood. From rectangular slats to refined decorative elements, all stages are visible within the one object, which becomes increasingly more defined, detailed, and fragile, but at the same time progressively more three-dimensional. (carwangallery.com, 2013)*

The piece was exhibited at the Carwan Gallery's space during the Salone del Mobile of Milan in 2012, Design Days Dubai and several other venues in the Middle East. This project has also appeared on most design websites and magazines like Designboom.com, Abitare, and Frame magazine.

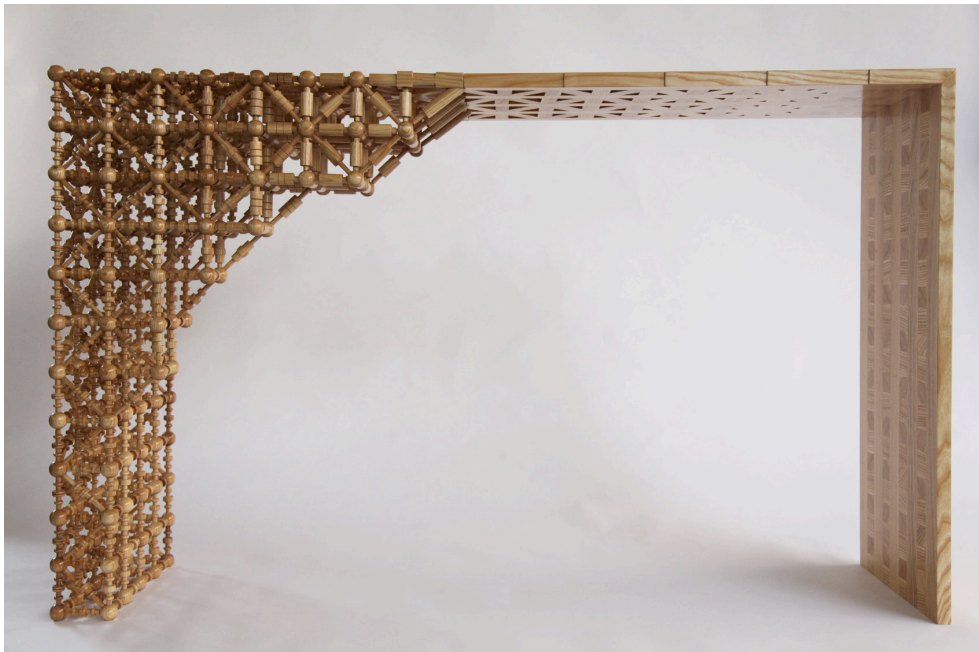


Figure 4.09. The Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard by Misher' Traxler

## 4.3.1 CASE STUDY 2: ANALYSIS

The Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard is part of a series of commissions from Carwan Gallery to selected international and Middle Eastern designers to propose pieces for a home furniture collection. The designers Katharina Mischer and Thomas Traxler of Mischer' Traxler recall a clear plan for the gallery, adopting the formula of pairing international designers with strictly Middle Eastern craftsmen (MT0:20:00). Carwan Gallery thoughtfully sent Studio Mischer' Traxler a list of items that were already being produced by other designers and craftsmen involved in the collection, which has been interpreted as an implicit request not to propose doubles (MT0:31:09). Such guideline seems dictated by a commercial strategy aiming to a diverse range of products. Both, the assignment of a specific craft technique and some guidelines in the possible outcomes, helped the designers to choose their direction within a brief that they describe positively in providing limitations and guidance (MT0:28:00). In

other commissions the designers are often given wide-ranging freedom, where a lot of effort has to be put in deciphering potential directions and cultural meanings (MT0:32:00). Pairing since the start designers and craftsmen is instead a decision drawing a strong conceptual link and multi-cultural connotation through the overall project. This conceptual and technical limitation imposed to the designers contributes to define the identity of the commissioner, and also makes the project attractive to both the Eastern and the Middle Eastern audience. The cultural distance between the Austrian background of the design duo and the Arab craft technique becomes a necessary element to come up with a unique and even naïve design that conveys all the research done on the craft (MT0:16:00).

The work of studio Mischer'Traxler is in fact beneficial for Carwan Gallery as it contributed to define its identity and build its "*heavier establishment*" on an international level (NB-L0:42:19). Such recognition comes from the fact that the designers have been capable of interpreting and visualizing efficaciously the identity and spirit of their commissioner. The exhibition of Mischer'Traxler's work for Carwan Gallery at several venues somehow authenticates such establishment.

The economic relationship between commissioner and designers is solely bound to the 25% of retail price that Carwan Gallery will remit to Studio Mischer'Traxler for each sale of the Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard. No design fee is paid upfront and this represents a risk for the designers. Craftsman Roger Thome seems to work on a more secure agreement since he is simply paid for his work, as it suits in a relationship with craftsmen.

Carwan Gallery is made wholly responsible for the *Distribution* of the object (MTs0:01:18). As a strategy for sale, Carwan Gallery, who does not have available a fixed space, participates in design fairs as a way to show and propose their collection to possible customers (NB-L0:39:30). Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte of Carwan Gallery admits their strategy to position the gallery amongst selected museums and art fairs. The amount of design events and festivals has become so numerous that a gallery can be present on the market simply by exhibiting in the many venues populating the design calendar. The Middle East also offers Art Centers in most main cities (Beirut, Doha, Rihad); these places are open to contemporary design and can serve as strategic spots where to capture the attention of the local audience. That is why the pieces move restlessly around main venues in the Middle East (NB-L0:40:39).

Amongst these fairs, Design Days Dubai is certainly the most important one. The participation in the Design Days Dubai event constitutes a deadline by which the project has to be completed. This deadline is met with great effort, allowing the commissioner to exhibit a final version of the piece at the Saudi design festival (MT0:10:24, NB-L0:20:39). At this venue in 2011 Carwan Gallery also organizes a performance featuring Mischer'Traxler and the Libanese craftsman responsible for the production of the Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard. The performance is planned so that the audience could witness the making of piece (Figure 4.10 and 4.11). It is the director of Design Days Dubai, who offers an additional space to Carwan Gallery if they

organize a performance involving studio Misher'Traxler (NB-L0:19:36). This performance with the two Austrian designers and the Lebanese craftsman is crucial to communicate the cultural and technical aspects of the project and catch the attention of both the audience and the press (MTs0:07:32, NB-L0:22:05). Katharina Mischer reckons that *“everything was a bit of a show”*, a way to explain and entertain the audience (MT0:09:26). But it is not only entertainment that is provided at Design Days Dubai. For the Carwan Gallery, this is the opportunity to propose the Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard as a product to be sold.



Figure 4.10. Thomas Traxler and craftsman Roger Tohme assembling the Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard during Design Days Dubai .



Figure 4.11. Parts of the Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard arranged on display during Design Days Dubai.

The staged performance at Design Days Dubai is the context in which contact with possible customers is made. Most notably the possible shoppers are prestigious members of the Middle Eastern society who, intrigued by the artefact decide to interact with its authors. This is an interesting situation in which a show – the performance – evolves through the participation of the audience – the nobles. It is so that the spectacular act of making featuring the Austrian duo and the Lebanese craftsman evolves into a likewise remarkable act of selling featuring Arab princes and princesses

It is in this context that Carwan Gallery forges a relationship with lifestyle magazine BrownBook. This relationship is based on a reciprocal exchange of *Visibility*: BrownBook prints a newspaper-like publication of the collection, in exchange Carwan Gallery grants BrownBook a shelf where to display and distribute copies of the magazine during the Salone del Mobile of Milan 2012 (NB-L0:25:37, MT0:35:38, MT0:37:34, MTs0:15:50). The Salone



del Mobile of Milan is the object of some digressive reflections of Mischer'Traxler. Katharina Mischer and Thomas Traxler are very explicit in describing how some collaboration happens only because of this event. More precisely their collaboration with clothing concept store "Wait and See" had the sole purpose of attracting the attention of the audience and media during the Salone del Mobile 2012 (MT0:54:45). Such attitude to speculation on the resonance of design festivals is not only adopted by small stores, but also big brands. Katharina notices that automotive brands, in particular seek *Visibility* by sponsoring design exhibitions to display during the Salone del Mobile (MT0:55:37, MT1:04:04). It is meaningful the statement of Katharina Misher that says: "*I think certain projects just happen because of media coverage*"(MT1:04:04). Such statement unveils an economy within the industry that spins mainly around the *Visibility of Designers*, design events and media.

Studio Misher'Traxler knows that their presence on the media is something that *Commissioners* and collaborators seek, and reflect shortly on how difficult it is to credit correctly the actors involved in their projects, so that authorship is not doubttable (MT1:00:50). It had happened to them that galleries distributing their works would express their disappointment when they would not see their names mentioned in interviews of Mischer'Traxler on magazines (MT0:56:09). Finally Katharina Mischer and Thomas Traxler agree that the "*supported by*" is a very clear formula, while "*in collaboration with*" is very attractive to *Commissioners* but leaves space to misunderstandings on the authorship (MT1:00:00). Another proof of the value of being credited in the projects of Mischer'Traxler's work is to be found in the request of the Austrian Ministry of Culture when supporting their participation to design festival DMY Berlin in 2010. The Austrian Ministry of Culture required their name to be included in communication material and then requested to see the resulting media reports as an evidence validating their support (MT0:51:45, MTs0:32:40).

Although *Visibility* on popular media is very appreciated by *Commissioners*, Mischer'Traxler and Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte observe that it does not reflect better sales. There is a distance between those reached by the media and those who buy (NB-L0:44:25, MT0:50:17). Mischer'Traxler tell an anecdote about someone contacting them after seeing their work published on a magazine freely distributed on planes. But these readers are then not able to follow with a purchase because they are not aware of the high price of the artefacts and the sale can only occur through the gallery.

## 4.3.2 CASE STUDY 2: SUMMARY

This case study concerns the proposal to commission work from a design pop-up gallery, named Carwan Gallery, for a project involving a specific craft technique to an Austrian design duo – studio Mischer'Traxler. This commissioner is concerned with the sales of the resulting artifact; therefore its attention is focused on making sure that the designers



propose an item that is not yet in the list of the available offerings of the gallery. Successively, the commissioner pushes the collection in the form of an itinerant exhibition in selected venues and contexts of the Middle East and Europe. The commissioner also organizes a performance of the designers and the craftsman at Design Days Dubai, which results in two sales of the limited edition of the designed piece. The profit of the designers is strictly related to the sales, as they are paid 25% of the sale price. The project takes advantage of a media partnership with Middle Eastern lifestyle magazine BrownBook that prints a catalogue of the collection in exchange of a space in Carwan Gallery's stands during the Salone del Mobile in Milan. The work of designers Studio Mischer'Traxler – the Gradient Masharabiya Sideboard – not only serves as a good to be sold, but it also helps the gallery to build their identity and communicate it to the design community.

Studio Mischer'Traxler is aware of the media power of their work and design in general. Often crediting other actors involved in their projects resulted in an incursion of difficult decisions and arguments. Crediting is made necessary by the will of people involved who are to be featured in the media alongside the name of the *Designers*, but if not done correctly it undermines the authorship on the design work. Media attention is regarded, especially by Katharina Mischer, as the fuel that powers some projects, as it happened when fashion store “Wait and See” in Milan asked them to propose some project to be exhibited there during the Salone del Mobile 2012, so to gather visitors and media. More broadly she observes a huge presence of car brands that during design festivals support exhibitions and *Designers* in order to benefit from the media exposure. The attention of the press is key in validating the investment made by a public entity. In this case, the Austrian Ministry of Culture valued the media reports regarding studio Mischer'Traxler's presence in design festival DMY Berlin. The Austrian Ministry agreed to subsidize the studio's participation in the event in exchange for the placing of the Ministry's logo on the material.

Case Study/Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard (2012)					Interviewee: Mischer/Traxler (designer)
MAP: PROCESS					
PIECE	<p><b>Carwan Gallery</b> they wanted to work on middle-eastern culture and craftsmanship and put the designers in order to move it on, to push it</p> <p><b>Carwan Gallery</b> it was clear that they would have liked something for interior use and also something that can sell, they gave us a list of what they already have, so it was clear it would have been good if we don't make a second product.</p> <p><b>Carwan Gallery   Heilmundknecht</b> we met in Berlin and discussed a bit and then we started discussing the project together. Then it was October and by December we needed to have the idea.</p> <p><b>Carwan Gallery</b> We gave them our portfolio which had our story, why we do things and how we do things. They approached us telling us they like the way we think and we are doing. And I think they tried to have various positions of disassembly, sometimes of shipping very nicely and good and some with more of a story/like</p> <p><b>Carwan Gallery</b> Yes, Dubai was in the plan, and... well everything was already decided, so it was not like we had to think and be liked to doing the project to, so they had it on a list "we would like to show there, there and there..."</p>	<p>In this project we were really just the designers. I think it was one of the first times that we were just the designers and not building it.</p> <p><b>Hoger Iohné</b> We had to face the first prototype and see the problems and react then to that, apply the changes to the next one. It was different.</p> <p><b>Hoger Iohné</b> Autocad drawings. All the separated pieces, how many pieces of each kind. It's around 50 different kind of pieces. We gave him all those layers and how to build it, how to join it together.</p> <p><b>Hoger Iohné</b> They are all custom made, all together they are 650 pieces, of 50 different kinds. Once he got all the pieces it was like in Lego, we did like instructions to build it layer by layer.</p> <p><b>Hoger Iohné</b> It was difficult being so far away, not being able to pop by and have a look, see if there is any problem.</p> <p><b>Carwan Gallery   Cyril Zammit</b> One was made for Dubai and it was sold in Dubai. And I think it was an artist proof somehow, because it wasn't really perfect yet. But this one we don't know. They plan to auction one.</p>	<p><b>Carwan Gallery</b> So it already fit in the gallery concept. It fitted automatically because we had the context of the Mashrabiya, which was already Middle-eastern.</p> <p><b>Cyri Zammit</b> Carwan Gallery found out that she was working with Carwan on a new project and he wanted a performance by us in the space of Carwan</p> <p><b>Carwan Gallery</b> Nicolas from the gallery called us "You want to go to Dubai? Everything is arranged already. You have a flight, you stay in a hotel, you have got a space. We want you to go there"</p> <p><b>Carwan Gallery</b> the performance part was more like that the gallery presented Mischer's ideas</p> <p><b>Hoger Iohné</b> Carwan Gallery In the beginning we had all 650 pieces on the wall lined up, telling the all the story of the project and then we started to take them down. Every day we were building a bit, but of course it was more like a show thing, cause we didn't use the glue, otherwise we couldn't take it back home and building up should have required machinery which we didn't have. Everything was a bit of a show.</p>	<p><b>Brownbook</b> I think this publication is nice the one from the gallery and Brownbook, even though there is never a finished piece in it</p> <p><b>Brownbook</b> - The picture was taken in Dubai - But you are not in the picture - Because I took it.</p> <p><b>Brownbook</b> Carwan Gallery It was a good thing to Brownbook to write about Mashrabiya, at the same time it was good for the gallery because it tells the story of the background, I feel like it's a project you could easily communicate with.</p>	COMMISSION
	DESIGN				
	PRODUCTION				
DISPLAY					
IMAGE					
DISTRIBUTION					
CONSUMPTION					

Figure 4.12.  
Process Chart - Case Study 2 - Interviewee Mischler/Traxler

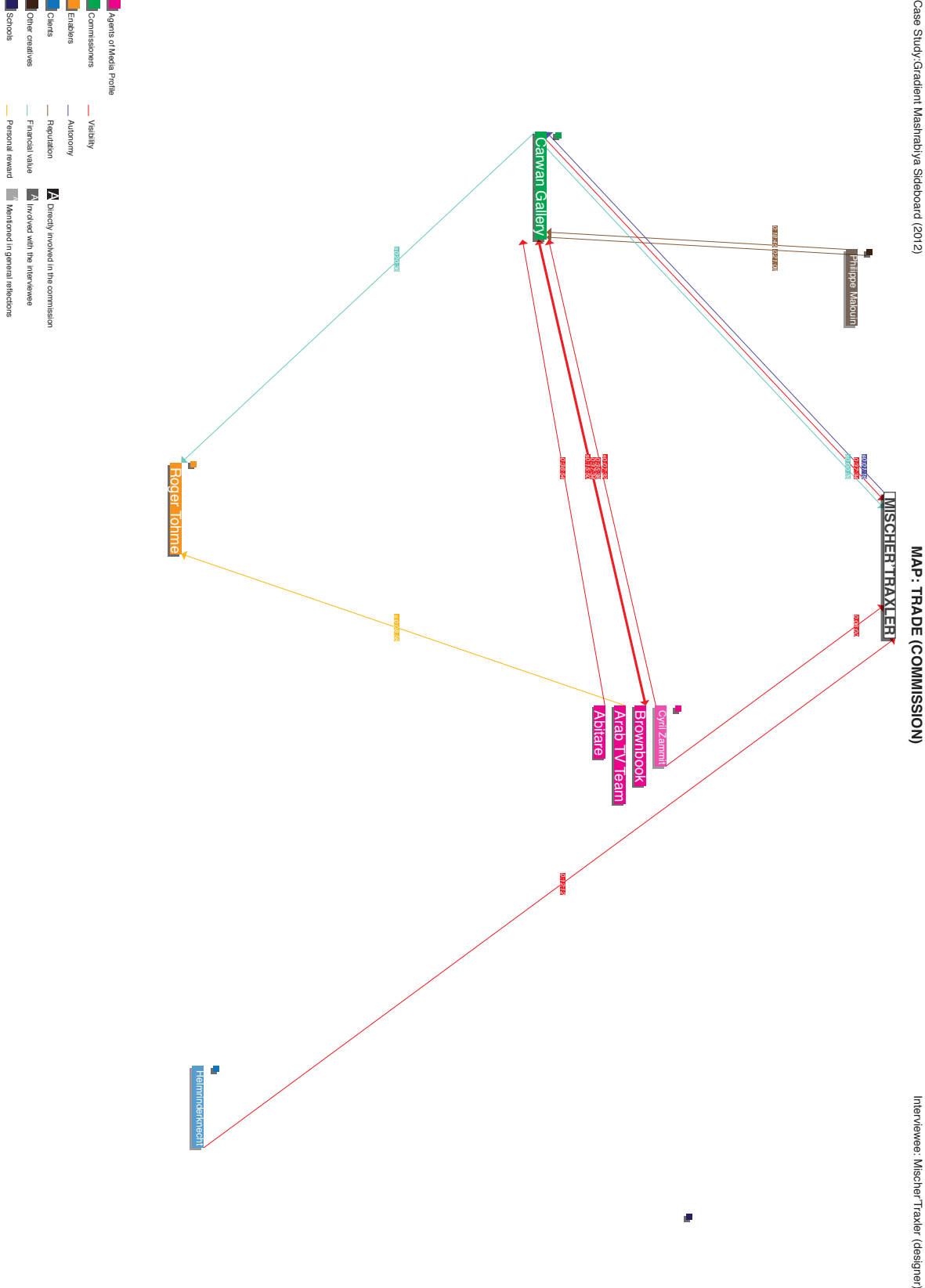


Figure 4.13  
Commission Trade Map - Case Study 2 - Interviewee MischerTraxler



Case Study:Gradient Mashrabiya Slatboard (2012)					Interviewee: Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte (commissioner)	
MAP: PROCESS (TRANSLATED)						
PIECE	<p><b>Mischer Traxler</b></p> <p>I met Khatana and Thomas when I was in Basel, I started to talk to them and I really liked their approach at the level of the process in the project design.</p>	<p><b>Mischer Traxler</b></p> <p>They have been trying for weeks to find videos of how to make mashrabiya and more ... on youtube ... and then I sent them two videos of the process and they managed to create a very beautiful language, because their research can be seen through the object.</p>	<p><b>Hoger Iohnme</b></p> <p>We made many prototypes that did not work, then there is not how carpenters work in Austria or in northern Europe, it is a somewhat more rough, especially when you give them a project for the first time ... then there are also the costs related to the thing because it is made of solid wood with all the different pieces.</p>	<p><b>Hoger Iohnme</b></p> <p>Let's say we were a bit in the comfort-zone as Charlier in the series that the most difficult work, which makes you read the model is always to check the details ... knowing how to deal with the artisan, say yes / no / yes / no, redo it again, in the end of how far you can push.</p>	<p><b>Sheikh Zayed Bin Khalifa</b></p> <p><b>A princess in Dubai</b></p> <p>The prince then also bought among other things, as well as another princess of Dubai which was also coming to our shows.</p>	<p>People were fascinated, because it was a very nice thing for products, but then when you get out a piece where you feel you got in a studio is another feeling also with respect to the project ... to understand the process, but I also think the printed object you stand and the performance was fantastic because you understand the whole process ...</p>
	<p>we really like to add a novelty, because obviously every museum wants an exclusive thing to add.</p>	<p><b>Cyri Zemann</b></p> <p>"Nicolas, Pascal, I think this shows that you are preparing is fantastic and I am willing to offer extra spaces if you want to program a performance with the designer or your choice"</p>	<p><b>Hoger Iohnme</b> <b>Mischer Traxler</b></p> <p>With these spaces on the walls of the stand, small small, with all 650 pieces with them ... Khatana, Thomas, plus the craftsman Roger Labarasse, this too were fantastic.</p>	<p><b>Hoger Iohnme</b> <b>Mischer Traxler</b></p> <p>Every day they went on to mount it, then at the end of the week they had assembled the whole thing. It was very spectacular.</p>		
	<p><b>DISPLAY</b></p>			<p>Then there is the promotional aspect that comes along with all this, also the aspect of curatorial research positioning, where to put ... in which museum ... which art fair ...</p>		
	<p><b>IMAGE</b></p>		<p>a gross strategy, like this we had great but all of the curators who went to Dubai have published this event.</p>	<p><b>Brownbook</b></p> <p>The brothers Bin Shakh, whom I met for the first time during Design Days Dubai, have been very impressed by the performance, see this is the photo booth in Dubai</p> <p><b>Brownbook</b></p> <p>Then they created this beautiful book, big like this that we then re-appeared now to the Beirut Art Fair</p>		
<b>COMMISSION</b>		<b>DESIGN</b>		<b>PRODUCTION</b>	<b>DISTRIBUTION</b>	<b>CONSUMPTION</b>

Figure 4.15.  
Process Chart - Case Study 2 - Interviewee Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte

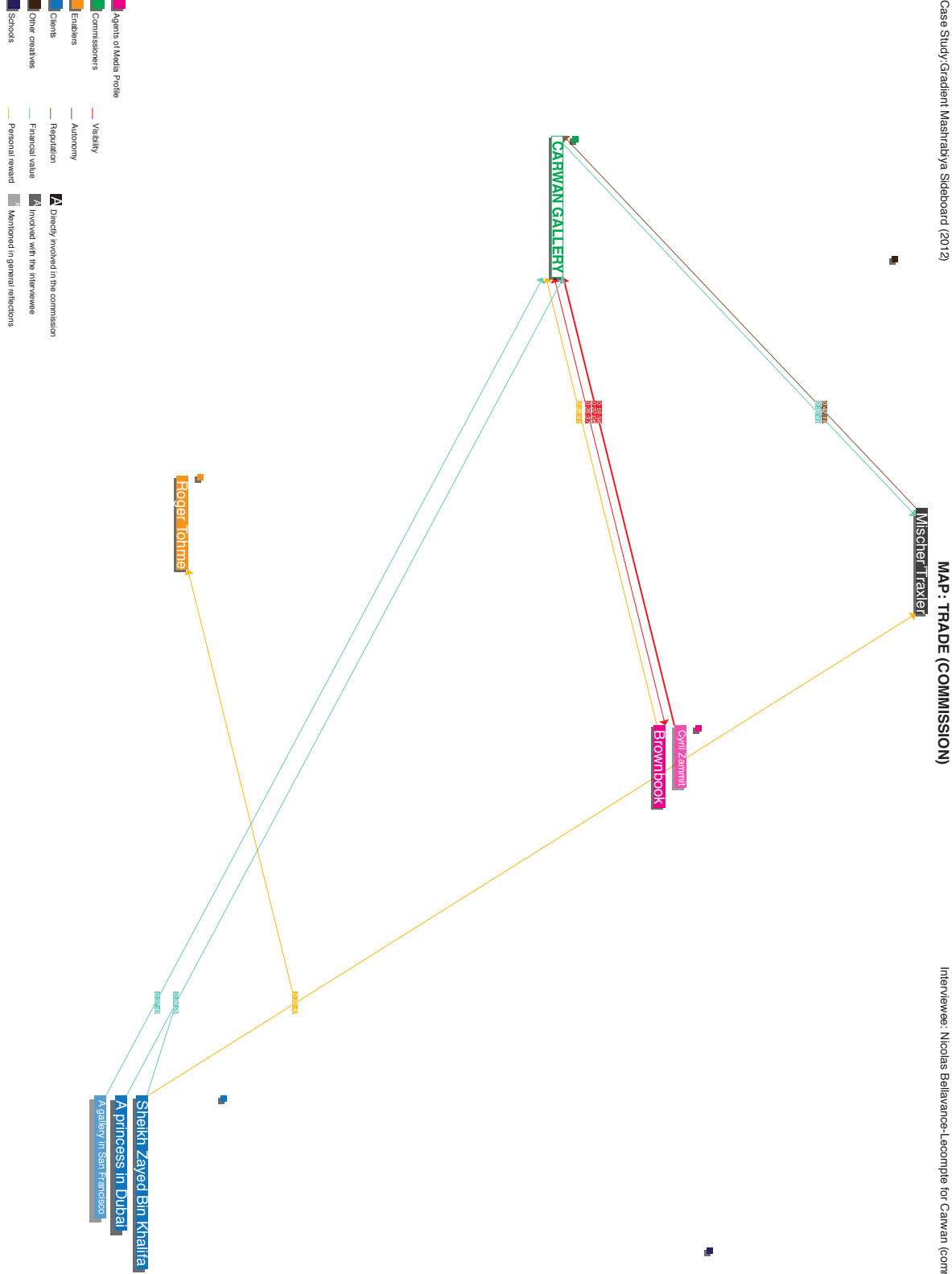


Figure 4.16.  
Commission Trade Map - Case Study 2 - Interviewee Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte

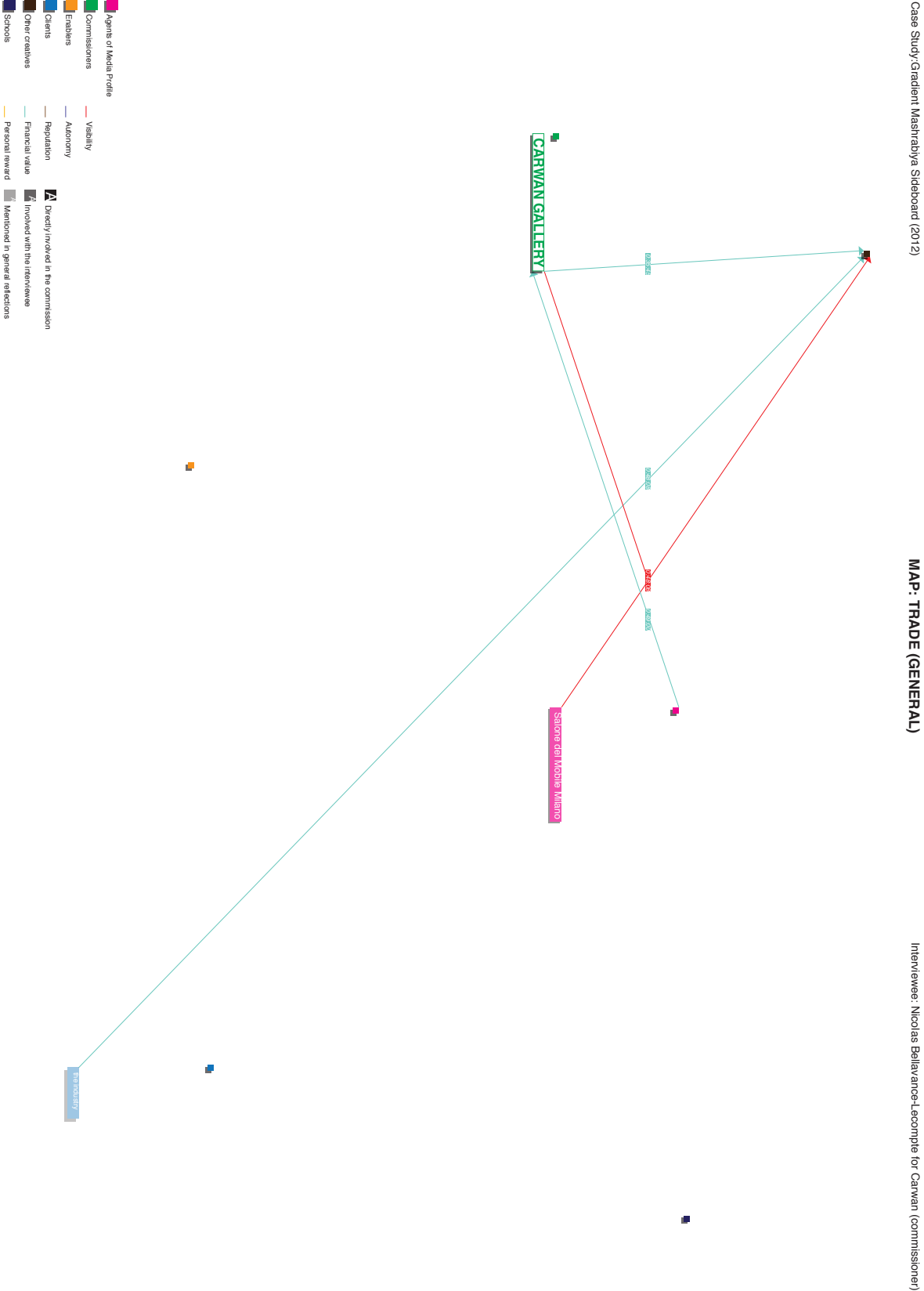


Figure 4.17.  
General Trade Map - Case Study 2 - Interviewee Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte

## 4.4 CASE STUDY 3: DUSK / DAWN MIRROR BY MINALE-MAEDA COMMISSIONED BY DROOG

Minale-Maeda is a design duo based in Rotterdam (NL) since 2006 founded by Japanese designer Kuniko Maeda and Italian designer Mario Minale. The two designers met while studying for their master at the Design Academy Eindhoven. On their website, the “About” page, their approach to design is described:

*they work between usable products and artistic statements as they see design founded in utilitarian needs but also an expression of culture. They are interested in the effects of consumerism and the improvement of life quality, the possibilities between mass-production and the cultivated skill of the craftsman. They see the contemporary challenge of the information society to embrace the immaterial and find realism in the artificial. (minale-maeda.com, 2013)*

During its career Minale-Maeda has collaborated with clients such as Droog, Skitsch, and have auto-produced pieces then distributed by design galleries in Europe and exhibited at main international design festivals. Their works have also been published in design and lifestyle magazines such as Vogue Maison, Elle Deco and Wallpaper, and they have been acquired in the permanent collection of the Centraal Museum of Utrecht.

Droog is a design company based in Amsterdam (NL). Since its debut at the Salone del Mobile of Milan in 1993 by designer Gijs Bakker and design historian Renny Remakers, Droog has captivated the attention of design critics for its conceptual and provocative approach. A number of Dutch designers gained fame by associating their names to the one of Droog to then develop their independent careers; among these there are Marcel Wanders, Hella Jongerius, Jurgen Bey and Tejo Remy.

For the 2010 edition of Salone del Mobile of Milan, Droog developed the concept for their annual show in via Alserio 22. Droog invited 14 designers to take on lots of products purchased from bankrupted manufacturers and give those items a second life. The resulting collection of 19 different products has been exhibited and sold in Milan, during the event. Among the invited designers, Minale-Maeda had chosen a lot of framed mirrors, to which they applied a colored gradient film. This project developed further by using better quality materials and finishing in order to produce the Dusk / Dawn Mirrors (Figure 4.18). On the product page on Droog’s website the piece is described as:



*Inspired by a reflection on a pool of water of the sky at dusk or dawn - the archetypical mirror - has become the basis for this mirror. Hung one way, it reflects dusk, and hung the other, it is dawn. (droog.com, 2013)*

Originally exhibited at the Salone del Mobile 2010 in Milan, the Dusk / Dawn Mirror was then developed and re-exhibited at Design Miami/Basel in 2010. Remarkably, it also won the annual Wallpaper award, thus gaining *Visibility* on the media. Marielle Janmaat, manager factory & outlet at Droog, has been interviewed to represent Droog.



Figure 4.18. The Dusk / Dawn Mirror by Minale-Maeda

## 4.4.1 CASE STUDY 3: ANALYSIS

The project resulting from this commission occurs in two phases, both triggered by the participation of Droog in design events Salone del Mobile of Milan and Design Miami/Basel. For the Salone del Mobile of Milan, Droog had developed the idea of purchasing lots of unsold products from bankrupted manufacturers in the Netherlands and assigning each lot to a selected designer. Among these, Minale-Maeda had been given a lot of mirrors, to which they decided to give a new life by applying a gradient transparent film on the reflective surface. The resulting mirrors had been sold during the Salone del Mobile of Milan, alongside the modified products of the other designers (Figure 4.19). A few months later, at the Design Miami/Basel event, Minale-Maeda proposed that Droog develop the same mirror into a high profile limited edition. The two design festivals represent the opportunity for this project to be commissioned. The first event has a prominent conceptual framework sparked by Droog, who proposed to give new life to unsold stock. The latter event in Basel

sees the designers developing the original mirrors into a better product for an event that aims to higher quality collectible objects. Remarkably, the two design events not only triggered the commission and dictated its timing, but also had an impact on the design of the piece, suggesting alternative materials and finishing.



*Figure 4.19. The first version of the Mirror as presented during the Salone del Mobile of Milan*

Mario Minale points out that contexts like Design Miami/Basel free the designers of limitations in terms of production costs and allow them to explore a wider spectrum of materials and production processes aiming for best quality (MM0:16:00).

Design events dictate a strict calendar for generating ideas and develop products. The strategy of Minale-Maeda for not falling into the rhythm imposed by such calendar is to keep an on-going research that generates an archive of ideas to draw from when commissions happen in proximity of such events. When commissioned, time is often tight and complete freedom is allowed, Mario Minale knows that having a stock of ideas to source from is the best way to work under those circumstances.

Design festivals are also the context within which design pieces are traded, as it happened with the mirrors during the Salone del Mobile of Milan (MM0:15:40). In fact one of the main points of the exhibition Saved by Droog in Milan (2010) was that visitors could purchase the items, including the mirrors. Mario remembers how the mirrors were quite popular sale items, inciting Droog to increase its price from 250€ to 600€ within a week (MM0:15:40).

This particularity of the design fairs makes them at the same time points of display and of sale.

The designers have also chance to interact with visitors during the fairs. Mario Minale enjoys when the people outside of the design realm access the work he has produced which is normally charged with layers of conceptual thinking resulting in expensive pieces. It is a way for his sophisticated design to enter the ordinary life. The true benefit for addressing to an audience that does not have a deep knowledge in design, is that a *Designer* can get from those people a genuine and “*free from prejudice*” feedback (MM0:37:41). Apart from these visitors, also representatives of the industry attend the design fairs. The display of the Dusk / Dawn Mirror often stokes the attention of industry members, who express interest in producing or distributing the item. However this does not result in collaborations with Minale-Maeda as those brands dictate certain limitations in terms of production techniques or distribution geographical areas. Such conditions do not meet the preferences of the Minale-Maeda who would prefer to self-produce the items and have someone passing them orders (MM0:24:00).

One of the reasons why *Designers* take part in design festivals is to obtain *Visibility* on the media and raise their profile. Such quest for attention can be costly. *Designers* have to manage the costs that obtaining *Visibility* incurs, such as participating in exhibitions or producing works that are intended to have prominence (MM0:39:41). However, investment in this pursuit is not always justified by the resulting income. A more efficient strategy developed by some *Designers* consists in operating with a smaller but more loyal circle of clients and collectors. These *Designers* who often had a moment of high visibility on the media in the past, have since cultivated a smaller network of collectors and customers that provide a steady income without having to look for more *Visibility* (MM0:40:00).

Addressing to a pertinent and receptive audience, like committed collectors, is necessary not to waste resources. This idea of a ‘better’ *Visibility*, rather than a ‘larger’ *Visibility* comes back again in Mario Minale’s words. He observes how important it is for both *Commissioners* and *Designers* to cultivate a network to be in touch with and to invite at events (MM0:36:00). This audience can range from the exclusive clientele of a gallery presenting at Design Miami or the opening of a museum to the clients of a brand at the Salone del Mobile of Milan and the likes. Where the designed artifact and the audience reached are mismatched, unnecessary communication duties for the designers could arise. For example, Minale-Maeda have in the past designed and produced the prototype of toaster that causes Delft-like ornamental burns on the bread. This item has never gone beyond the prototype stage, although it had circulated in the media, reaching thousands of readers. Until now, especially in close proximity to the yearly Christmas festivities, Minale-Maeda had to deal with a huge amount of emails and unexpected visits from people requesting that toaster. As this anecdote illustrates, the *Visibility* of the designed artefact in the wrong contexts can be misleading for the viewer and result in a waste of time and effort for the *Designer*.

Like other *Designers*, also Minale-Maeda have a list of contacts that they keep updated with their new works. For this purpose, they often take studio-like pictures of their latest productions. The image that circulated on the media of the Dusk / Dawn Mirror on a white background comes from the intuition of Mario Minale, who took the picture from a height by laying the mirror on some Styrofoam tiles (MM0:26:00).

Initially, the *Image* of the *Piece* is spread by the designers themselves via their email activity. Such activity reaches and triggers a neuralgic point of the design media network, which is represented by the chief-editor of Wallpaper. It is by reaching this actor that Mario Minale believes the mirror had been awarded and further spread on the design media. The dynamics of how Wallpaper was informed about the projects are not definitively certain, but Mario Minale remembers sending studio's newsletter about the Dusk / Dawn Mirror to the Chief-editor of Wallpaper, whom he had met at previous fairs. A few days later, Wallpaper asks for the mirror and eventually awards it as best mirror of the year 2011. Mario Minale suspects that, due to the timing of the events that transpired and to the fact that Wallpaper is not in Droog's close network, they had sparked a chain of events culminating with the award (MM0:27:15). The designers' network is therefore something from which the commissioner benefited from.

The award given by Wallpaper to the Dusk / Dawn Mirror represents a considerable benefit for Droog as it highlights the quality of the product. The fact that the Droog sales representatives adopt the logo of the award-winning product by Wallpaper in his digital signatures in emails and press-releases is illustrative of how much the "*quality label*" is valued by Droog (Figure 4.20 and 4.21). For Marielle Janmaat, this award also helps to communicate the status of Droog, which is the one of a brand and not a gallery or a platform (MJmail1). The status of Droog is an issue that chases the Dutch company since its beginning as their curatorial activity left space for misunderstanding (MJ0:18:24). Droog had always been regarded with respect for its offering on a conceptual level. But Droog wants to address also the part of the audience that is not particularly concerned with concepts or statements, but that simply demands quality artefacts, like the Dusk / Dawn Mirror. Now this prize frames Droog as a brand that produces and sells quality products, according to Marielle Janmaat. The award is therefore a matter of *Reputation*, rather than *Visibility*.

It is when Marielle Janmaat tries to describe the qualities that a *Designer* needs to have to be successful that the word "*fame*" makes its appearance in the interview. She admits the necessity for the designer to build his or her fame, because such a quality – which is not fully described and needs to be interpreted – is crucial to having a wider group of possible customers (MJmail3). When Marielle explains the qualities that a good *Designer* has to possess she mentions the need for a strong personality so to present him or herself in a recognizable way (MJmail2). These qualities are transferred to the designed products, as more people are willing to "*buy products of famous people*" (MJmail3). Marielle Janmaat reckons that the excess of fame of certain *Designers* has sometimes been a factor leading to the decision for Droog not

to commission them, that might be because of the necessity of not overshadowing Droog's name (MJ0:28:00). Although Marielle Janmaat does not relate further thoughts on this aspect it becomes clearer that the process of commissioning someone involves a complex evaluation of factors, including the media profile of the *Designer*. Marielle Janmaat is convinced that, at the present, in order to be a *Designer* one has to possess more than just design skills and an entrepreneurial attitude. It is personality and fame that allows a *Designer* to stand out and draw in a larger group of people willing to buy his or her products. For Mario Minale critics, journalists, and curators provide validation for the *Designer's* work, so contributing to the prestige of the *Designer's* name (MM0:06:31). The prestige of a *Designer's* name not only has an impact in the industry, but also design education is not exempt from it. As Mario Minale mulls his thoughts during our interview he observes how students seek teachers amongst recognizable names, aiming hopefully to secure an internship or just a prominent name to include in their CV (MM0:44:35).



Figure 4.20. The e-mail signature of Droog's Sales Representative now includes the Wallpaper Award logo

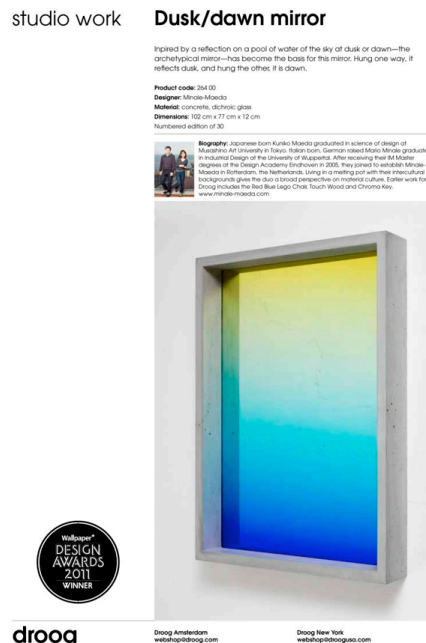


Figure 4.21. The press release by Droog including the Wallpaper Design Award

Although *Reputation* is not explicitly mentioned, it is to be found in the concept of validation and fame cited by the interviewees. While fame also has a strong connection to the idea of *Visibility*, validity is a quality that does not relate as easily to the broadness of the audience, but rather to the status of those who provide it. In the case of the Dusk / Dawn Mirror, it is the Wallpaper editorial staff that validates the quality of the work and therefore the actors involved. It is interesting to observe how in this case study artefacts are mediums for transferring and exchanging value. A famous person can sell his or her fame via the product, but also an award-winning product transfers its *Reputation* to the actors involved in its creation from commission to sale.



## 4.4.2 CASE STUDY 3: SUMMARY

This case study depicts the commission granted by Amsterdam based and well-known brand Droog to the Italian-Japanese design duo Minale-Maeda operating from Rotterdam. This project occurs in two phases, both elicited by the participation of Droog to design events Salone del Mobile of Milan and Design Miami/Basel. For the furniture fair of Milan, Droog has selected a number of designers and assigned each to lot of unsold products from liquidated manufacturers in the Netherlands. Minale-Maeda gave a new life to a lot of framed mirrors, by applying a gradient film on their reflective surface. Visitors of the Salone del Mobile of Milan could buy these mirrors, alongside other modified products. The same concept had then been developed further into a higher end limited edition for Design Miami/Basel event. Marielle Janmaat of Droog describes the two events as two different contexts with a differing role for Droog and the design industry. The Salone del Mobile of Milan is a “*place where you can show the thoughts you have generated for the future*” (MJ0:06:00), thus making the festival assume a cultural connotation. Design Miami/Basel is more of a commercial fair where galleries meet their private clients and propose the sale of their exclusive limited editions to them. Between the two typologies of events, Marielle Janmaat is convinced Droog possesses preeminence within the former. For a *Designer*, design festivals are an opportunity to capitalize from the archive of ideas generate during the career path and propose those when commissioned, as freedom is often granted.

The mirror was then awarded "best mirror of 2011" by Wallpaper. The award is the result of Minale-Maeda's dissemination of their newsletter by email, which reaches one of their personal contacts, the chief-editor of Wallpaper. This award is crucial for Droog - not merely for the *Visibility* it generates - but most notably because it addresses some issues regarding Droog's status in the design industry. Droog has often been perceived as a platform, a design collective or simply a gallery, where instead its ambition is to be recognized as a design brand that commissions, produces and sells products. The Wallpaper award, according to Marielle Janmaat, helps Droog to clarify its role as a brand in the industry. It is also a source of pride for the persons who are involved in the project, thus hinting at an exchange of *Reputation*, rather than *Visibility*. The anecdotes of how the award came to be, with Minale-Maeda sending the newsletter to the right people – the chief-editor of Wallpaper – rather than to many people introduces a remarkable concept in the topic of *Visibility*, that is a concept concerned with quality rather than quantity. The same thought surfaces when Mario Minale mentions events where design is presented to an audience, such as festivals and museum openings. Where the designed artefact and the audience reached are mismatched an extraordinary and inefficient communication for the designers could arise. For example, Minale-Maeda have in the past produced a design for a toaster that causes Delft-like ornamental burns on the bread. This item has never gone beyond the prototype stage, although its popularity on the media has caused numerous contacts and inconvenient visits from people requesting it. Mario also remarks on how the quest for *Visibility* incurs considerable investments for *Designers*, which do not

always result in better earnings. Some *Designers* who previously benefitted of *Visibility* in the media now seem to be on the outside of the media radar. In reality, a profitable model in which they operate with a smaller circle of clients and collectors has been adopted. During design festivals, one true benefit for addressing to an audience that does not have a deep knowledge in design, is that a *Designer* can get from those people a genuine feedback.

Marielle Janmaat is convinced that, at the present, in order to be a *Designer* one has to possess more than just design skills and an entrepreneurial attitude. It is personality and fame that allows a *Designer* to stand out and draw in a larger group of people willing to buy his or her products. It is the process of building a *Designer's* name, which – as Mario mulls his thoughts – has an impact also in design education, where students seeking teachers amongst recognizable names, aiming hopefully to secure a prominent name to include in their CV.





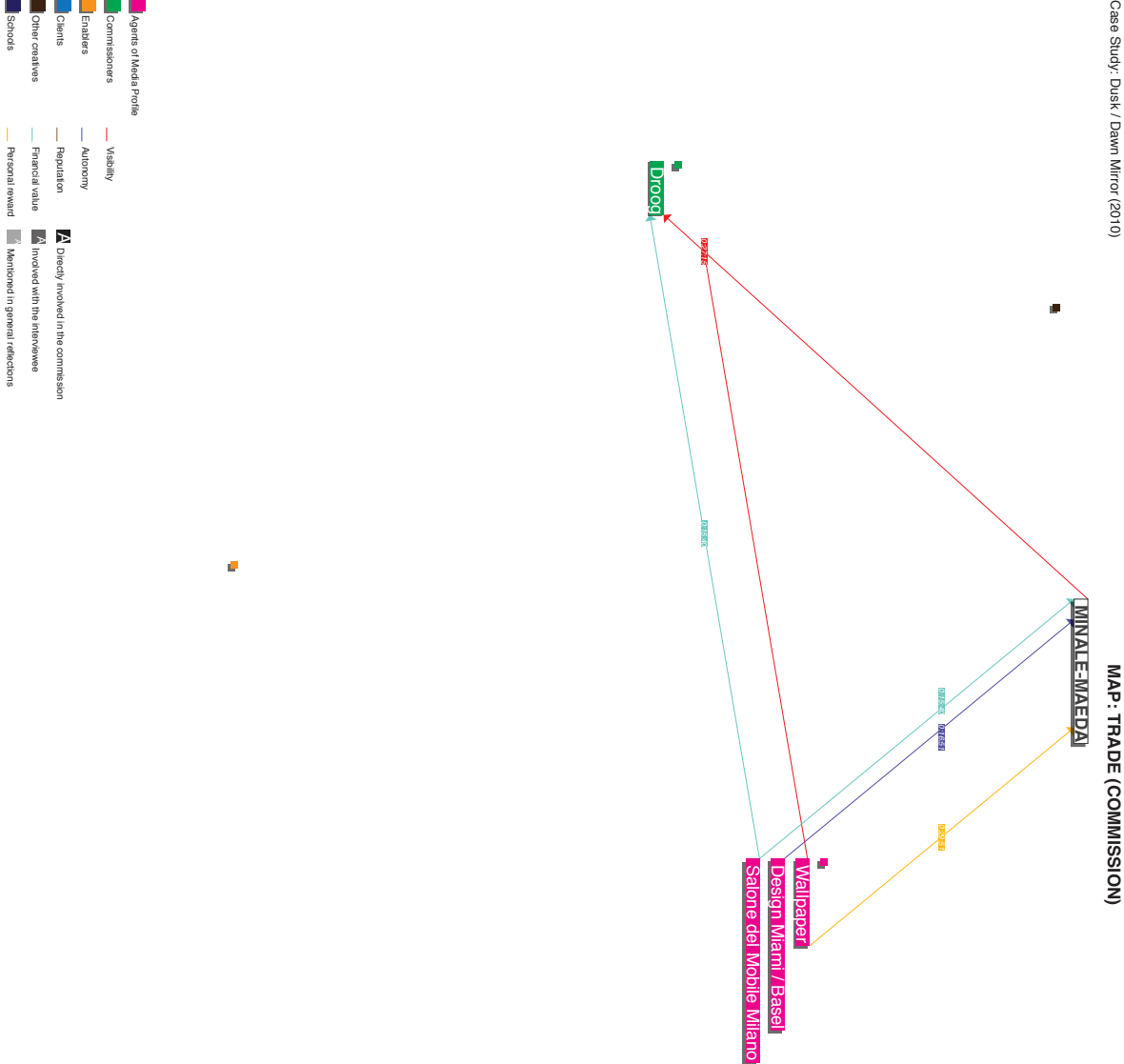
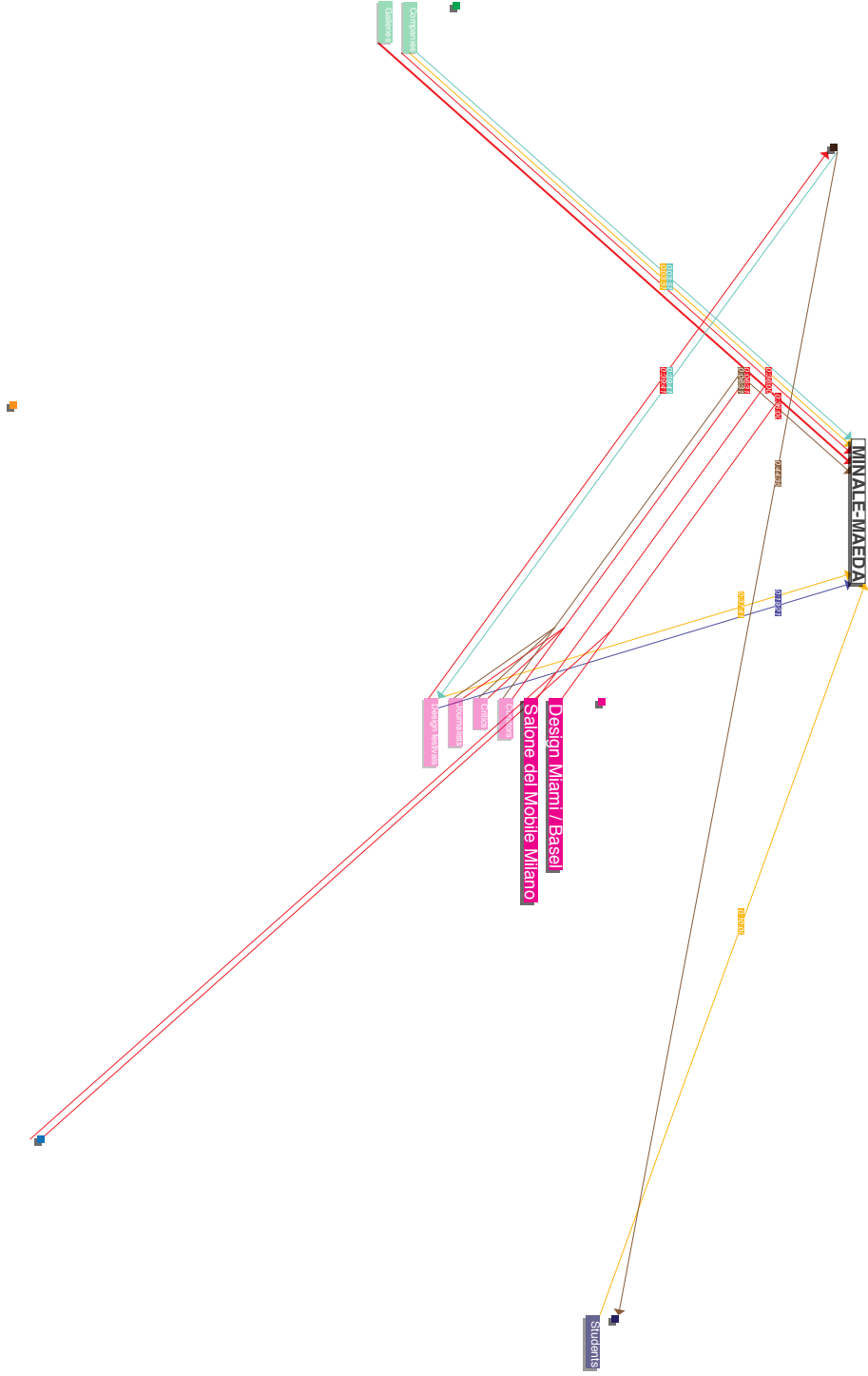


Figure 4.23  
Commission Trade Map - Case Study 3 - Interviewee Mario Minale

Case Study: Dusk / Dawn Mirror (2010)

MAP: TRADE (GENERAL)

Interviewee: Mario Mirale for Mirale-Maeda (designer)



- Agents of Media Profile
- Commissioners
- Enablers
- Clients
- Other creative
- Scholarship
- Visibility
- Autonomy
- Regulation
- Financial value
- Personal reward
- Directly involved in the commission
- Involved with the interviewee
- Mentioned in general reflections

Figure 4.24.  
General Trade Map - Case Study 3 - Interviewee Mario Mirale

Case Study: Dusk / Dawn Mirror (2010)				MAP: PROCESS		Interviewee: Mariëtte Jannat for Droog Design (commissioner)
PIECE	<p>We did a project with him in Milan we presented their idea and we bought it on an auction because the company which was already producing it went out of business.</p> <p><b>Minale-Maeda</b></p> <p>they were also working on this, they presented it to us basically.</p> <p><b>Minale-Maeda</b></p> <p>We helped them for instance with the concrete casting. We always try to think together with the designer. We don't only say: 'this is your commission and we want you to deliver now, can you deliver now?' but we also try to think together with the designer manufacturers. It's really like co-working, instead of commissioning.</p> <p><b>Minale-Maeda</b></p> <p>No, for Milan 'Saved by Droog' we had the brief and we had a pool of products, because it was based on already existing products. So when we came up with the idea -- Paimo generated this idea -- we presented the at package to a group of designers, which was selected of course. We selected Minale Maeda, because we thought they could work with already existing pieces.</p>		<p><b>Minale-Maeda</b></p> <p>Mario and Kuriko came up with this idea to add this gradient layer over the existing mirror and then they really loved the idea and they wanted to take it few steps further especially on a quality level and they designed this high high quality piece.</p> <p><b>Minale-Maeda</b></p> <p>maybe they already had this idea, because of course working with gradients was probably something they were already thinking about or working on.</p> <p><b>Minale-Maeda</b></p> <p>But in this piece they could really go to the best producers in the world and go for the highest quality you can get in mirroring glass.</p> <p>they are not all produced. They are produced on demand.</p> <p><b>Design Miami / Basel</b></p> <p>because the quality of this piece is so high and also the costs to make it, we decided this could be a beautiful piece to show in Basel too.</p> <p><b>Design Miami / Basel</b></p> <p>We exhibited this piece for the first time in Art Basel Miami, in Basel. It was something which was done by our American department.</p>		<p>unfortunately is quite expensive, that's a pity. I think we sold one or two.</p>	
	<p><b>Walpaper</b></p> <p>It was awarded as top design in 2011, by Walpaper.</p>		<p><b>Design Miami / Basel</b></p> <p>when it was exhibited in Basel people came back. They were all these funny people. Some of them came back together and looking and looking and looking.</p> <p><b>Design Miami / Basel</b></p> <p>If you look at the pictures, it's already beautiful, but if you stand in front of it, you really get lost in this work, which is shown behind the mirror.</p>			
DISPLAY						
IMAGE						
COMMISSION	DESIGN	PRODUCTION	DISTRIBUTION	CONSUMPTION		

Figure 4.25  
Process Chart - Case Study 3 - Interviewee Manelle Jannat

MAP: TRADE (COMMISSION)

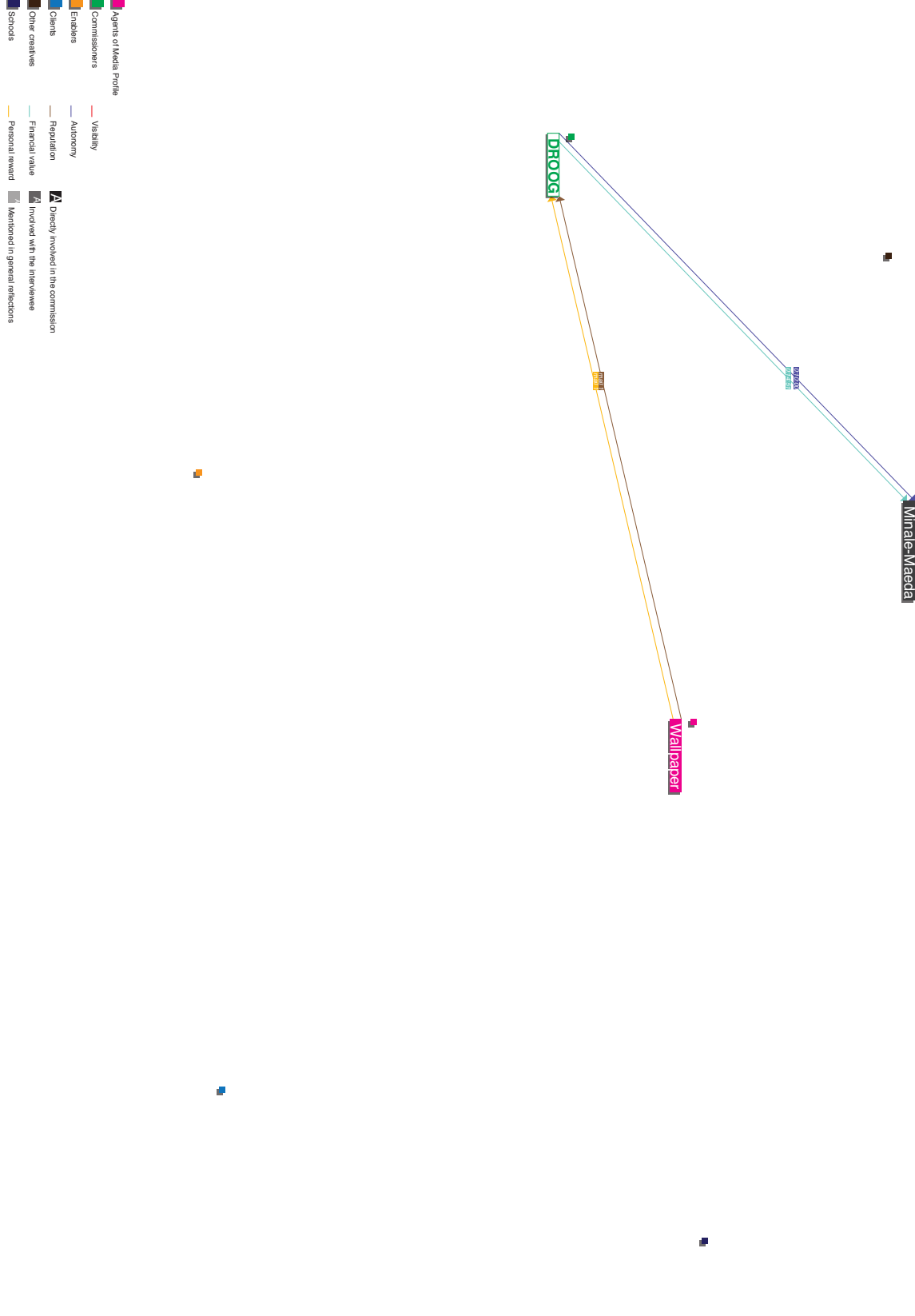


Figure 4.26.  
Commission Trade Map - Case Study 3 - Interviewee Mariëtte Jansmaat

Interviewee: Maniëlle Janmaat for Droog Design (commissioner)



Figure 4.27.  
General Trade Map - Case Study 3 - Interviewee Marielle Jammaat

## 4.5 CASE STUDY 4: COLOURED VASES BY HELLA JONGERIUS COMMISSIONED BY PHAIDON PRESS

Hella Jongerius is a Dutch Designer and graduate of the Design Academy Eindhoven in 1993. She made her first appearances in the international design scene as participant in the first exhibitions of Amsterdam gallery, Droog (Jongerius et al., 2011). Along her path in design she has taught at the Design Academy of Eindhoven, collaborated with prestigious design brands as Vitra and IKEA, as well as produced limited editions and one-off pieces. Her work is considered of great importance for Dutch, and more generally, contemporary design. In fact, objects designed by Hella Jongerius are a part of the most authoritative public and private collections held by MoMA of New York and the Design Museum of London. Her eclectic production garnered her fame for being versatile and yet having a unique and recognizable approach mixing craft and industrial processes, conceptual thinking and refined aesthetics (Schouwenberg and Jongerius, 2003). The Design Museum of London on its website describes her approach to design as:

*[...] on the cusp of design, craft, art and technology to fuse traditional and contemporary influences, high tech and low tech, the industrial and artisanal* (Designmuseum.org, 2013)

Hella Jongerius' practice takes the name Jongeriuslab, and is currently based in Berlin and Utrecht.

Phaidon Press is a British publisher with headquarters in Europe, America and Asia. Its main focus is on arts, architecture and design. Some of Phaidon's publications like the Phaidon Design Classics volumes became strong references in the context of design publishing. Emilia Terragni is the Editorial Director of Phaidon Press. She works from the office in London and she played a crucial role in initiating and directing many of the recent publications of Phaidon Press, including the monograph about Hella Jongerius.

Through the years Phaidon Press has developed a series of limited editions publications labeled as Collector's Editions, in which monographic books are paired with artifacts or prints of selected artists. One of the books of this series is about Hella Jongerius and it is entitled Misfit. Each book accompanies a unique vase of the collection Coloured Vases (Figure 4.28). Misfit is described as:

*The most comprehensive monograph on Dutch designer Hella Jongerius, one of the most individual and influential product designers working*

*today. Each book is signed by Hella Jongerius and numbered to match the specific recipe reference code of its corresponding vase. The fabric cover of each book has been chosen to match the unique pigmentation of its vase. There are over 300 photographs of Hella Jongerius' work. Stitch-bound and organised by colour, Misfit tells the story of Jongerius' career whilst bringing you into the rich world of Hella's creativity. (Phaidon.com, 2013)*

The book *Misfit* has also been released in an unlimited edition with a slightly different cover and binding, but identical in its content. As it will be described in the following sections, it is impossible to sunder the commission of the book from the commission of the vases. Therefore this case study encompasses both projects as one commission initiated by Phaidon Press for designer Hella Jongerius.

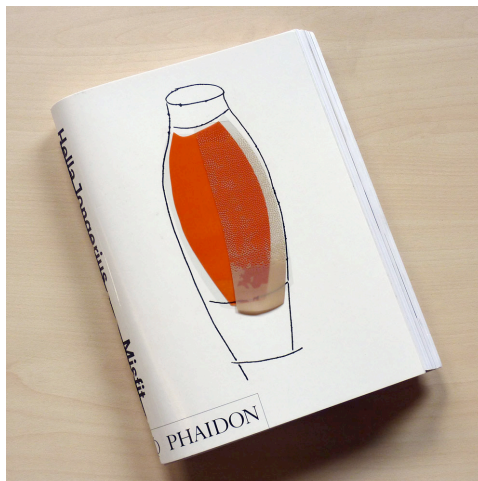


*Figure 4.28. Six of the 300 Coloured Vases by Hella Jongerius.*

## 4.5.1 CASE STUDY 4: ANALYSIS

This case study describes the process and trade occurring contextually to the commission initiated by the British publishing house Phaidon Press to the German-based

Dutch designer Hella Jongerius. This commission has the double purpose of generating a limited edition collection of an artifact to pair with a special edition of monographic books, as well as an unlimited edition of the same book (Figure 4.29 and 4.30). The two versions of the books are identical if not for some slight changes in the cover and the designer's signature and serial number in the limited ones (ET0:04:00). As she receives this proposal, Hella Jongerius understands the potential of this commission in completing her ongoing research about coloured glazes (HJ0:07:46). With her research agenda in mind, Hella Jongerius starts building the network of actors that could be involved in the project to achieve the best results.



*Figure 4.29. The unlimited version of the book Misfit published by Phaidon Press*



*Figure 4.30. The Collector's Edition of the book Misfit with the vase*

It is her contact made with the prestigious ceramic company Royal Makkum Tichelaar – whom she had intensively collaborated with at previous stages of her career – thus creating the network of actors needed to make the project happen. In concert with Royal Makkum Tichelaar, Hella Jongerius decides to make a collection of vases on which different types of glaze are apposed and overlapped, producing 300 unique pieces. In order to optimize costs, Hella Jongerius and Makkum Tichelaar opt for the use of the mold of a vase Hella Jongerius had designed in 1997 and is strongly associated with the Dutch Designer. The commissioner has gladly accepted such proposal seeing that the shape of the vase is archetypal of Hella Jongerius' aesthetics and the research on colour is representative of her current interests (ET0:06:00). The end result of the research on the recipes and its application onto the existing vases resulted in what the designer defines as a good product, appeasing the expectations and demands of designer, commissioner and producer (HJ0:08:00, HJ0:11:40). Besides Royal Makkum Tichelaar, graphic designers Irma Boom, and design critic Louise Schouwenberg, who wrote the previous book about Hella Jongerius, complete this network. All the contacts are provided and requested by Hella Jongerius. By commissioning her, Phaidon Press accepts and accesses the network that she has planned. (ET0:09:00). This network is fostered by the money made available by Phaidon Press, who directly takes care of the production of the book, also suggesting changes and solutions and pays to Royal Makkum Tichelaar the production



of the vases. In this project Hella Jongerius was more than just a commissioned designer. She was also managing a budget granted to her by Phaidon Press and that she used to insure the design services of Irma Boom and writing skills of design critic Louise Schouwenberg for the content of the book (ET0:32:45).

The resulting network embodies two symmetrical couples. On one side is Hella Jongerius, designing the vases with Royal Makkum Tichelaar taking care of their production, on the other side, Irma Boom designs the book with Phaidon Press advising and producing it. The role of Irma Booms, designer of the book, is to interpret the aspects of Hella Jongerius' work and convey them in the design of the book. This is in the way colours subtly dominate the way the book is organized or in the imperfection of the binding that well represents the work of Hella Jongerius (ET0:07:34, ET0:08:00).

Remarkably, this commission generates outcomes as exclusive products for collectors, popular monographic books for readers and installations for visitors of museums and fairs.

Phaidon Press has promoted this project online, but also by organizing an event at New York gallery Moss, by participating in the Design Miami/Basel and by including the vases at Hella Jongerius' exhibition at the Boijmans Museum in Rotterdam (ET0:19:12) (Figure 4.31). Although Hella Jongerius would have had this exhibition regardless from this commission, the 300 Coloured Vases arranged by Hella Jongerius in a ring-shaped installation – called the Wheel of Colours – became its central piece (Figure 4.32). For this exhibition at the Boijmans Museum, the book had been used and sold as its catalogue (ET0:22:25, ET0:25:04). The involvement of Hella jongerius in talks, lectures and exhibitions - like the one at the Boijmans Museum in Rotterdam represented for Phaidon Press opportunities to make themselves visible to the audience while supporting the designer (ET0:20:28, ET0:22:25).

The commissioner sees the venues where the project has been exhibited as a good addition to the commission. In particular, the participation of Phaidon Press to the fair Design Miami/Basel, has “*confirmed the radical role*” of Phaidon Press (ET0:31:12). Such event has stated the fact that Phaidon Press is able to collaborate closely with the designers and allow them to realize things that otherwise would not happen. For the commissioner that wants to keep its *Reputation* in the design community, design events are important for presenting itself as participants to the career and development of an international designer like Hella Jongerius. It is therefore a process of public validation manifested during design fairs.

Phaidon Press as a true representative for design is therefore able to trade design artefacts, beyond the books. The fact that the commission comes from a publisher and involves the design, production and sale of a product is indicative of the blurred border between the production and media industries in design.

The *Autonomy* given to the designer for this commission is “*total*” (ET0:23:09). This is so for

the design of the artefact, for the strategy adopted to sell the vases, and also to choose whom to collaborate with for the design of the book and production of the vases as well (ET0:09:00, ET0:21:01). Such *Autonomy*, especially on the strategy for distributing the vases, has been granted mainly because Hella Jongerius “*knows the market*” for exclusive products, which is something that Phaidon Press lacks.



Figure 4.31. Hella Jongerius' solo exhibition at Boijmans Museum of Rotterdam



Figure 4.32. The installation *Wheel of Colours* by Hella Jongerius

For selling the vases, Phaidon Press has taken advantage of collaboration with Galerie Kreo who passed a list of collectors who are normally interested in Hella Jongerius' work (ET0:20:12). Furthermore, Phaidon Press together with Hella Jongerius has divided part of the collection into groups of 3, 5 or 7 pieces. By doing so they have enlarged their possible pool of customers from individual collectors to museums, which could buy a mini-series of vases (ET0:20:00). The profits coming from the exclusive vases and from the sales of the popular book are almost the same, although such balance could change in the longer term as the book can be reissued (ET0:24:00).

Phaidon Press' wish to limit the costs meets also Hella Jongerius' will to produce a book that is affordable. It is also for this reason that the books are produced in China where the manual labour is cheaper than Europe (ET0:16:00, ET0:18:00). Emilia Terragni of Phaidon Press also highlights the fact that for Hella Jongerius it is important that the vases are sold, not only for economic reasons, but because it is a great satisfaction that her products reach the consumers (ET0:32:00).

But the book, the vases and the exhibitions are not the only outcomes when commissioning someone like Hella Jongerius. Hella Jongerius knows that the dissemination of her projects in the media is a crucial and delicate step at the end of each project. A project cannot be finished without its circulation in the media (HJ0:14:12). Media reports are not something she takes care of merely to please her *Commissioners*. She rather feel the necessity to spread her work in the best possible way, thus meaning in the right magazine and with the right interviewer eventually (HJ0:14:38). She recalls how at the initial stage of her career Droog was holding a leading position in communicating to the media. It is only after she had ceased her collaborations with Droog that she could "*drive her own car in the media*" (HJ0:02:00).

Now she interacts with the media with remarkable independence. She dictates the timing in which she would appear on the media and also the conditions for allowing the media to visit the studio and document her work (HJ0:13:07). Hella Jongerius almost has a rate plan when it comes to her negotiation with representatives of the media. For a six to eight pages article, journalists and photographers are allowed to visit the studio and take pictures, while smaller articles are not worth of such concessions (HJ0:13:43). Keeping contact with the media, understand which ones are good, keep a regular presence on those, keep an archive of portraits to give to the media and negotiate time for pages of media coverage, all this is part of Hella Jongerius' regular practice (HJ0:20:00, HJ0:13:07). In order not to engulf the pace of the studio with media-related activities, Jongeriuslab has even decided for the strict rule of not accepting video shootings (HJ0:18:00).

Obviously, this expertise is something that a *Commissioner* can benefit from. Also Emilia Terragni admits that Phaidon Press' business benefits sensibly by their appearance on weeklies like New York Times, the Observer and the likes (ET0:38:00). Hella Jongerius has a shrewd knowledge about the design industry and she does not hide it in the interview. She knows that

*Commissioners* approach designers with *Visibility* in their agenda. Commissioning a “*star or good designer*” is, according to Hella Jongerius, a strategy for *Commissioners* to gain *Visibility* and access the media-realm. It is in the expertise of an established *Designer* with a media profile the ability to deal with the media (HJ0:04:00). Hella Jongerius is no exception. She knows that a project is not finished until it is put on the media, and this is a demanding task (HJ0:14:12).

Through her career she has noticed that the media industry behaves according to the companies associated to her projects. Media are reluctant with projects commissioned by big companies that do not have a universally good *Reputation* within the design community, like IKEA or KLM (HJ0:15:15). While they have been receptive with Hella Jongerius’ self initiated projects or with her projects for furniture company Vitra (H0:15:31, HJ0:16:04). Apparently Phaidon Press belongs to the type of commissioners that the media do not support easily. When trying to disseminate the project through the media, Hella Jongerius realized that “*Phaidon is not an animal that everybody eats*” (HJ0:17:45). This meaning that the *Reputation* of Phaidon Press, or maybe just its overlapping area of action with the other media, represents an obstacle for the project to circulate promptly in the media.

However, The name of the Boijmans Museum associated to the project as the venue where the project has been premiered, contributed to add a cultural layer to this commission (HJ0:17:45). This has favoured the appeal of this project for the media. As Hella Jongerius articulates her reflections about the cultural profile that projects need to parade in order to circulate on the media, she realizes the value that media give to her name. When Hella Jongerius communicates to the media her self-initiated projects, the “*cultural allure*” (HJ0:15:31) surrounding the Dutch designer clears up any doubt from the media and help their reactivity. Media love mentioning her name and consequently so do large companies commissioning her, to the point that they rather highlight it by avoiding the lengthy crediting imposed by Hella Jongerius who would like to include the name Jongeriuslab after her surname (HJ0:05:12).

## 4.5.2 CASE STUDY 4: SUMMARY

The commission of British publisher Phaidon Press to Dutch designer Hella Jongerius aims to spawn at the same time a limited collection of an artefact and an unlimited edition of a monographic book about the designer. In complete *Autonomy*, Hella Jongerius opts for a research on coloured glazes to be applied on 300 vases, part of her repertoire. She imposes a graphic designer, Irma Boom, and a ceramic producer, Royal Makkum Tichelaar. Phaidon Press accepts these conditions, agrees on a budget that Hella Jongerius manages to pay Irma Boom and writer Louise Schouwenberg. Phaidon Press also takes charge of covering production costs to Royal Makkum Tichelaar. Hella Jongerius also represents for Phaidon Press the opportunity to exhibit the outcome of this commission at the Boijmans

Museum of Rotterdam. With this project Phaidon Press steps in the world of design, not only as a medium, but also as an active actor able to initiate relevant design projects. Such role is validated at the fair Design Miami/Basel. As the commission results at the same time in a collection of exclusive vases, a book and an itinerant installation, it is able to reach museums, collectors, readers and visitors.

Hella Jongerius also shares in the interview the way she manages her relationship with the media. She knows that *Commissioners* approach her with the purpose of accessing the media realm. Her relationship with the media is therefore an important part of her profession; she is in constant touch with media representatives, as she knows that a project is not over until it goes on the press (HJ0:14:12). This is not for narcissism or advertisement, but because a project needs to be out there, in the right context and with the right interviewer. Most of the time media are receptive when she triggers them; media love the “*cultural allure*” surrounding her. It is more problematic when bigger companies are involved and media start smelling that unpleasant advertisement odour.





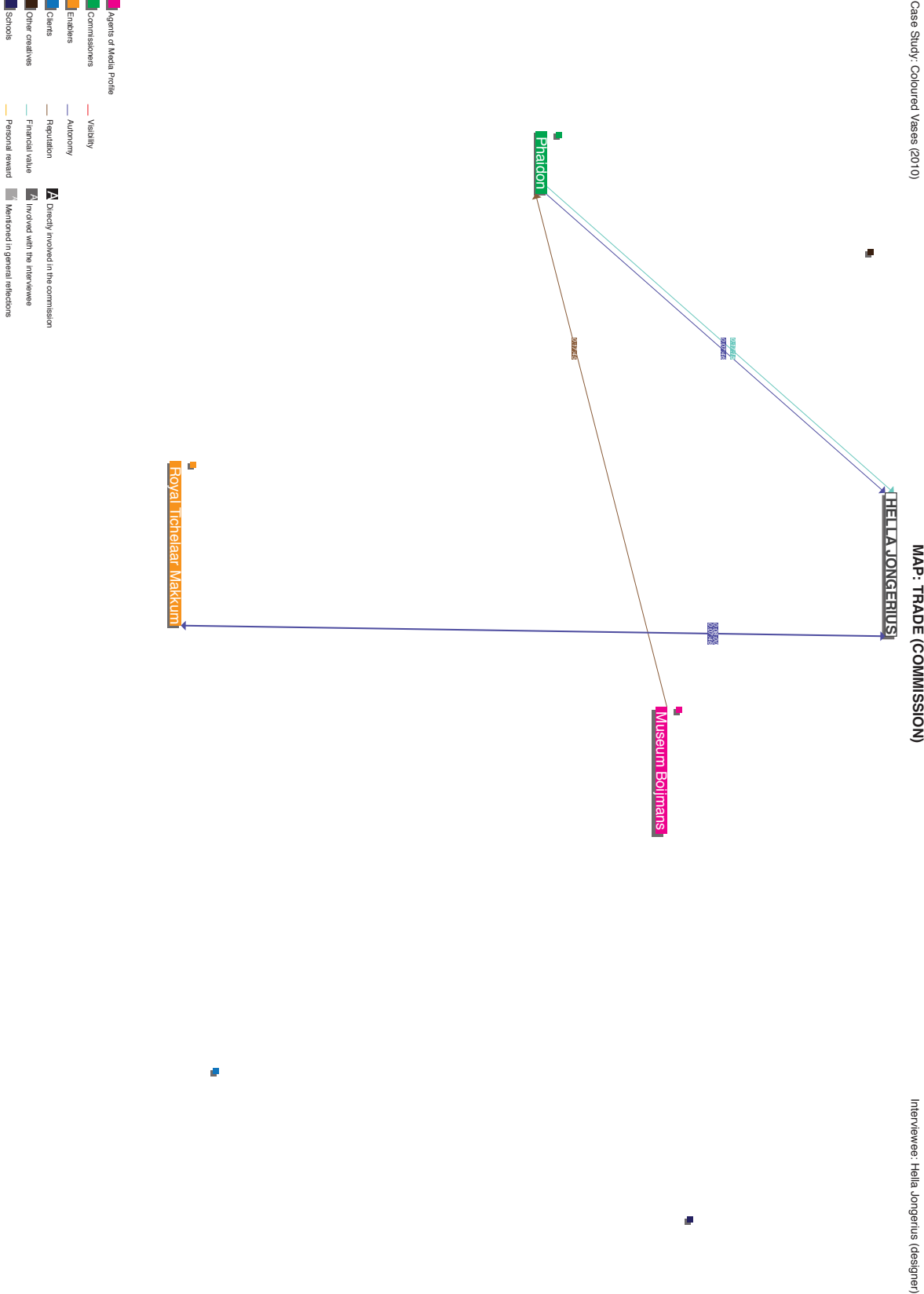


Figure 4.34  
Commission Trade Map - Case Study 4 - Interviewee Hella Jongerius

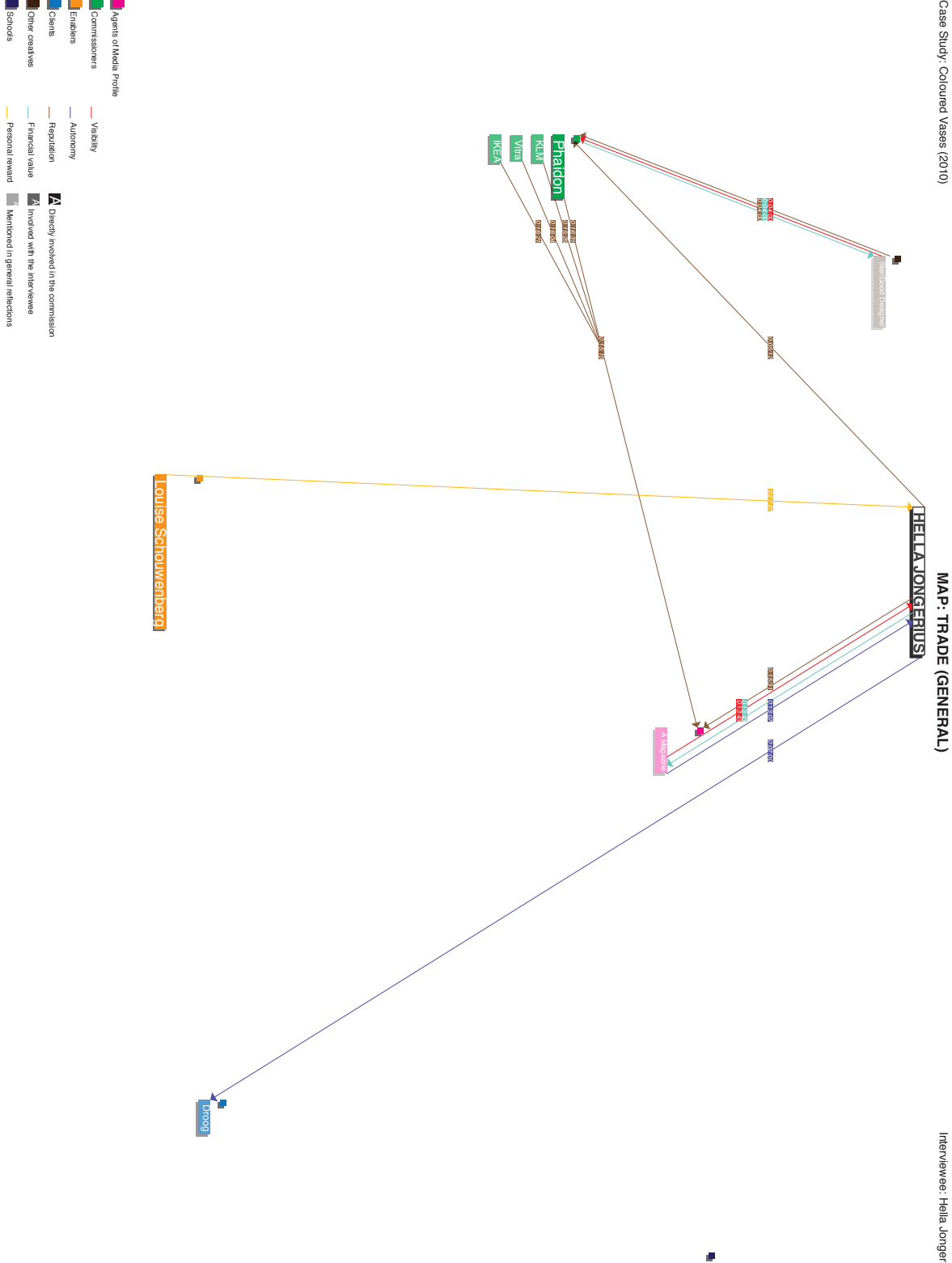


Figure 4.33.  
General Trade Map - Case Study 4 - Interviewee Hella Jongerius



### Case Study: Coloured Vases (2010)

Especially at a time when there was this boom of limited editions in design, we thought that even at the level of product design had to do something similar.

## Hella Jongerius

With Hara, we started talking after a few years. We have published the first book on the fact that its production had changed a lot, because in the meantime she had begun to work with companies like Vira where there is clearly a very different business model from what she was doing with Droog or limited editions.

**PIECE**

**Hella Jongerius**

She was at that time working on this new vessel, *Misfit*, which we thought was very interesting because it was a bit this idea that this was a vessel that was part of her curriculum, because this shape that she uses in different ways

# Hella Jongerius

We began this book with the idea that we wanted to do a book with an object. But when she sent me the first draft of the book that had the vase on the cover she already knew she wanted to do the vessel. Basically the proposal is coming together, the vase and the book together.

## Hella Jongerius

with this new way of doing that practically made an order of 300 pieces in which each individual piece was completely different. Because it is the basis of colors depending on how they are stacked give a completely different result. So I really liked the idea of having a product that is in part industrial, because the production of the vase itself is a craft production, however, is a mold... but then this fact that these colors that she depicted especially valuable when the new work was very specific about the color.

chelaar Makkum

### Royal Tichelaar Makkum

yal Ticheelaar Makkum

Irma did the graphics of the box and we did its construction and Makkum has made the production

### MAP: PROCESS (TRANSLATED)

We have a number of warehouses

Royal Tichelaar Makkum

**Hella Jongerius**

## Hella Jongerius

Also with the Kreo gallery. Even there, precisely because it is a network, for which they have passed to us their customers that normally buy things by Hella ...

## Galerie Kreo

## Hella Jongerius

## Hella Jongerius

edice spoke of these vessels in terms of the color asked if it was possible to make mini installations vessels that made sense from the point of view of color and that she has just chosen

## Hella Jongerius

<p>The entire nation no longer exists but there is a replica that can be sold only as a whole, and this installation is the one that is normally used for the sale of the nation.</p>	<p>Collector</p>
<p>Individual pieces, it may be sold as an installation to a museum or given on loan.</p>	<p>Museum</p>

## Collector Museum

half are sold individually and half are sold as installation, so there is a market between the collector and the museum.

## Design Miami / Basel

we made two big events. There was an exhibition of Hellra at the Boijmans and that was the first, then we presented the design in Basel Miami and then we presented it in New York from Moss

Museum Boijmans  
Moss Gallery

**Hella Jongerius** **Museum Boijmans**

At Boijmans it was a retrospective exhibition that she would have had regardless

Hella Jongerius  
Museum Boijmans

**Museum Boijmans**  
then it was used as a catalogue at Boijmans, but it is not a catalogue

There is a special version of the book that comes with the vase

We did a bit of a campaign on the internet

Irma Boom

browsing through it like this it switches to green, then there are the yellows, reds and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book

Irma Boom

and that she tries to give to the reader or anyone that holds the book

## Hella Jongerius

this book is not expensive - which is another thing  
Hell a strongly wanted

The book counts in terms of volumes, presence, copies sold. In fact we are re-issuing it.

We sell many more books at much lower prices

	<p>Especially at a time when there was this boom of limited editions in design, we thought that something similar</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>With Hella we started taking after a few years we have published the first book or the fact that she produced a lot of limited editions and that we propose she had things to work with in companies like Vitra where there is clearly a very different business model from what she was doing with Droog or limited editions</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>We began this book with the idea that we wanted to do a book with an object. But when she sent me the first draft of the book that had the vessel on the cover she already knew she wanted to do the vessel. Together the proposal is coming together, the vessel and the book together</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>She was at that time working on this new vessel, Meert, which we thought was very interesting because it was a bit like this</p> <p>But this was a vessel that was part of her curriculum, because this shape that she uses in different ways</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>And the center piece of the exhibition was this installation she calls "The wheel of color". The manner in which they are arranged is always the same, with the same color sequence</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>With this new way to color that previously made an edition of 300 pieces in which each individual piece was completely different. Because it is this the basis of color depending on how they are stacked give a completely different result. So I really liked the idea of having a product that is in part industrial, because the production of the vessel itself is a craft production, however, a good - but then the fact that these colors that she applied especially at a time when there for work was very specific about the color.</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>the book is not organized in a chronological order, not by type, and then the color becomes a way to organize this idea of the Meert</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>There are two types of paper here, and clearly when they suggest papers are always super expensive papers, so to find something that has the same quality as the expensive papers, we had to go to China because there is a lot of manual work that we can not do in Europe.</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>Also about this binding of the book we had a lot of discussions, because she really wanted it with this idea of imperfection</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>There are two types of paper here, and clearly when they suggest papers are always super expensive papers, so to find something that has the same quality as the expensive papers, we had to go to China because there is a lot of manual work that we can not do in Europe.</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>Even the cover, for example, Hella wanted this thing of colors that reacted precisely to the vessel, which is a three overlapping colors, and depending on how they overlap colors change. That Hella had asked a was to put the vessel on the cover and then see how the colors change. But every time one takes them of what happens? Why do not we find something that you can reproduce, and that in fact refers even more about how the vessels are made?</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>She thought of it with staples and then he would have used a much thicker paper because she did not know how to do it, and asked it was us that proposed to do this thing with the wire</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>The book is not organized in a chronological order, not by type, and then the color becomes a way to organize this idea of the Meert</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>There is a special version of the book that comes with the vase</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>When Hella, but me that she wanted to do this book with Hella Boom, I said "perfect"</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>Also about this binding of the book we had a lot of discussions, because she really wanted it with this idea of imperfection</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>Even the cover, for example, Hella wanted this thing of colors that reacted precisely to the vessel, which is a three overlapping colors, and depending on how they overlap colors change. That Hella had asked a was to put the vessel on the cover and then see how the colors change. But every time one takes them of what happens? Why do not we find something that you can reproduce, and that in fact refers even more about how the vessels are made?</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>The book is not organized in a chronological order, not by type, and then the color becomes a way to organize this idea of the Meert</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>When Hella, but me that she wanted to do this book with Hella Boom, I said "perfect"</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>Also about this binding of the book we had a lot of discussions, because she really wanted it with this idea of imperfection</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>Even the cover, for example, Hella wanted this thing of colors that reacted precisely to the vessel, which is a three overlapping colors, and depending on how they overlap colors change. That Hella had asked a was to put the vessel on the cover and then see how the colors change. But every time one takes them of what happens? Why do not we find something that you can reproduce, and that in fact refers even more about how the vessels are made?</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>The book is not organized in a chronological order, not by type, and then the color becomes a way to organize this idea of the Meert</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>When Hella, but me that she wanted to do this book with Hella Boom, I said "perfect"</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>Also about this binding of the book we had a lot of discussions, because she really wanted it with this idea of imperfection</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>Even the cover, for example, Hella wanted this thing of colors that reacted precisely to the vessel, which is a three overlapping colors, and depending on how they overlap colors change. That Hella had asked a was to put the vessel on the cover and then see how the colors change. But every time one takes them of what happens? Why do not we find something that you can reproduce, and that in fact refers even more about how the vessels are made?</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>The book is not organized in a chronological order, not by type, and then the color becomes a way to organize this idea of the Meert</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>When Hella, but me that she wanted to do this book with Hella Boom, I said "perfect"</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>Also about this binding of the book we had a lot of discussions, because she really wanted it with this idea of imperfection</p>		<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>showing brought a like this it switches to green, then there are the yellow, red and then you end up with dark colors. That is one thing that is not immediately identified in the book</p>	
	<p><b>Hella Jongerius</b></p> <p>Even the cover, for example, Hella wanted this thing of colors that reacted precisely to the vessel, which is</p>			

Figure 4.36.  
Process Chart - Case Study 4 - Interviewee Emilia Terragni

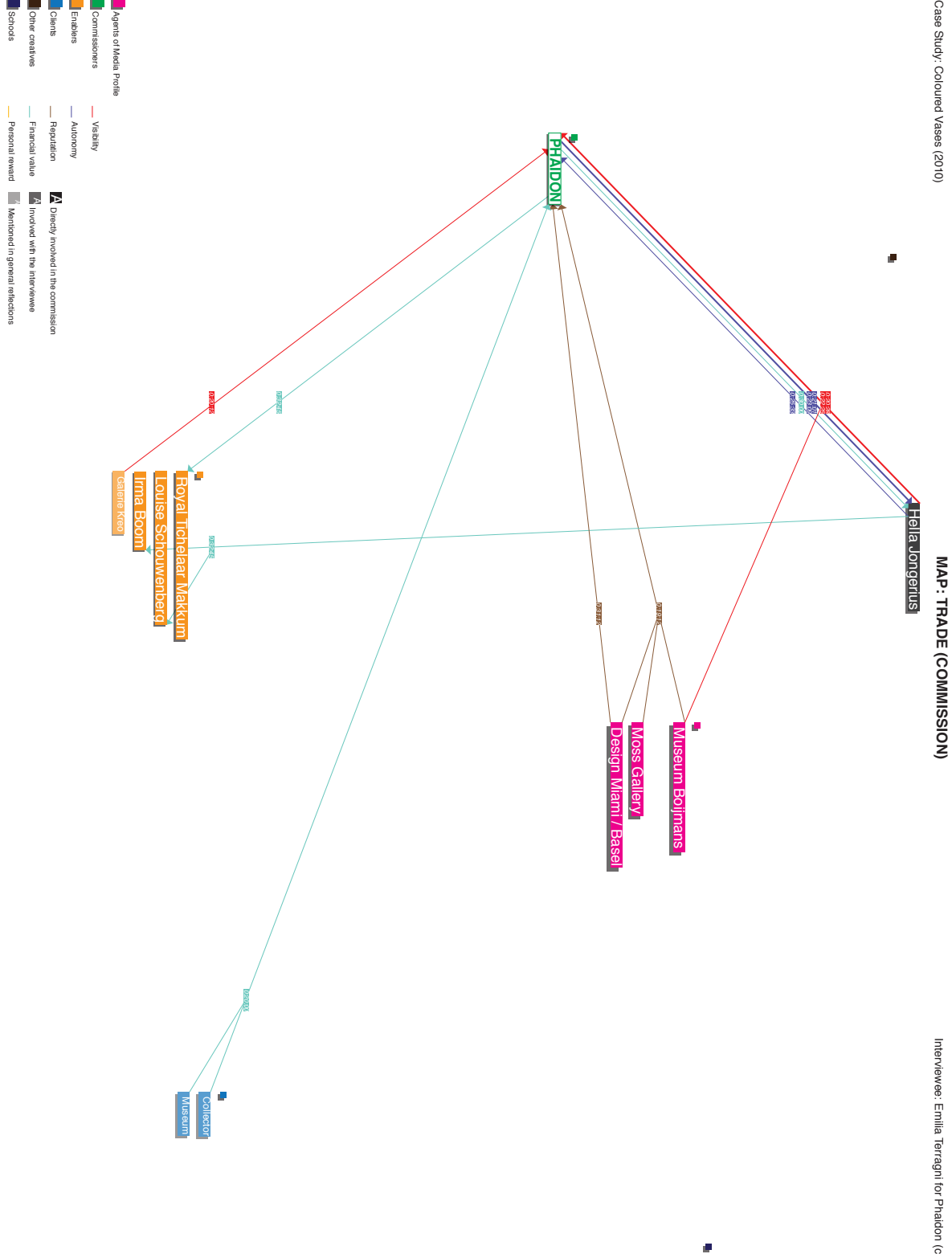


Figure 4.37.  
Commission Trade Map - Case Study 4 - Interviewee Emilia Terragni

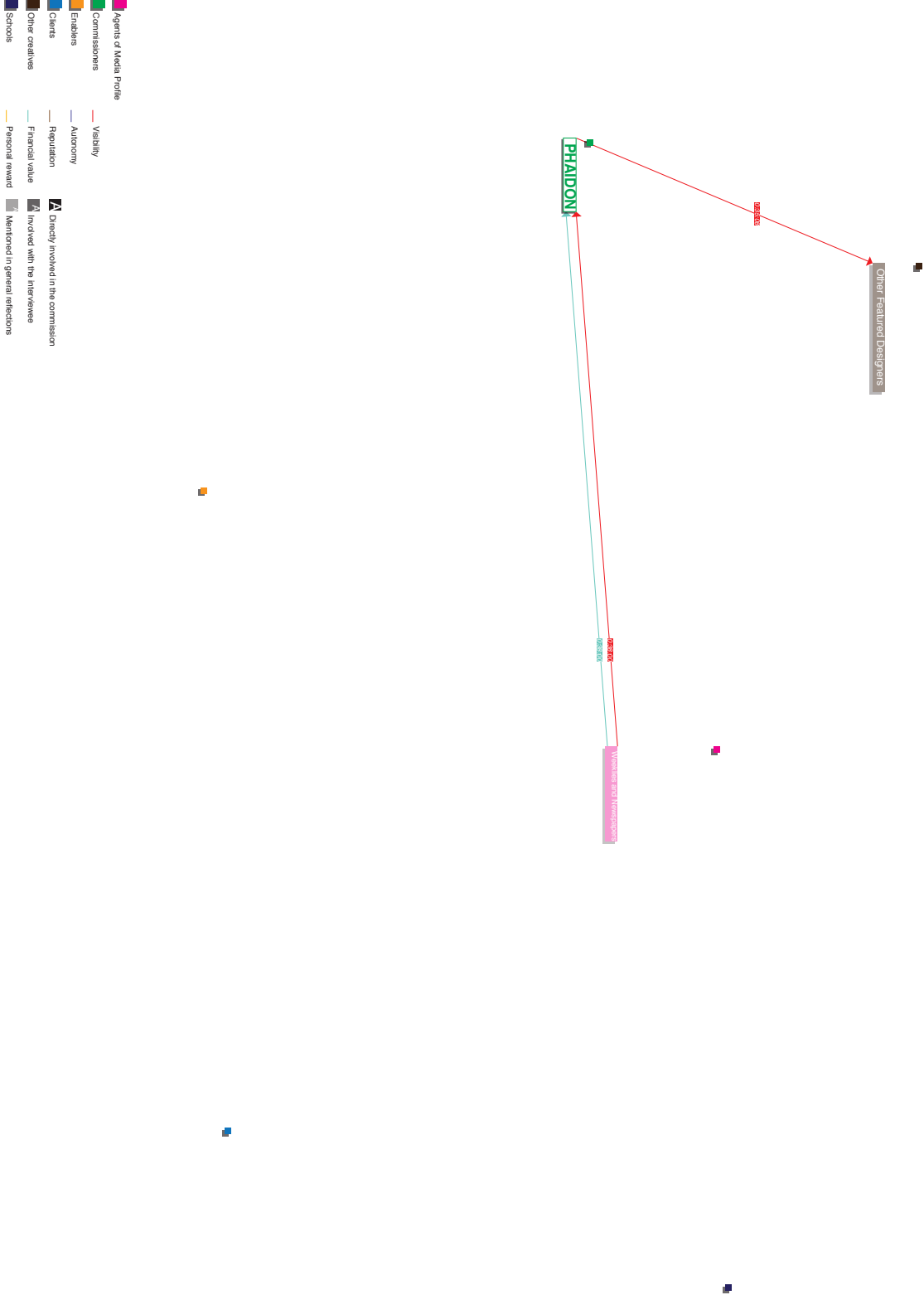


Figure 4.38  
General Trade Map - Case Study 4 - Interviewee Emilia Terragni

## 4.6 CASE STUDY 5: STREAMLINE CARPET AND TORQUE VASES BY LANZAVECCHIA + WAI COMMISSIONED BY MERCEDES-BENZ AND CASE DA ABITARE MAGAZINE

Lanzavecchia + Wai is a studio founded and run by designers Francesca Lanzavecchia and Hunn Wai with bases in Pavia (Italy) and Singapore. Francesca and Hunn met while studying on the Design Academy Eindhoven's masters program and since then have continuously collaborated and built their reputation within the design community. As stated on their website the studio:

*[...] garnered attention and accolades in major design platforms such as the SaloneSatellite, Fuori Salone and the Triennale Design Museum in Milan (IT), MAXXI – the National Museum of XXI Century Arts in Rome (IT), DepotBasel (CH), Interieur Kortrijk (BE), IMM in Cologne (DE), Tokyo Design Week (JP) and Beijing Design Week (CN). Their work have also been represented and promoted in internationally renowned periodicals like Wallpaper, Newsweek, FRAME, Flash Art, Form, Metropolis, ICON, DAMn, Items etc... [...] Their recent accomplishments include being featured by Newsweek as one of the "Designers of the Future", in June 2012, and shortlisted for Wallpaper\* Design Awards 2013 – "Life-enhancer of the Year" for their MonoLight table lamp. (lanzavecchia-wai.com, 2013)*

Lanzavecchia + Wai's focus is on product design spanning from limited editions to consumer products. For this study, Francesca Lanzavecchia has been interviewed in the studio in Pavia.

Mercedes-Benz is the multinational division of the German famous car manufacturer. As a global brand name, Mercedes-Benz is involved in countless promotional activities from the organization of events, sponsorship of sport teams, production and distribution of merchandise to branded accessories and various other items.

Case da Abitare is a monthly magazine about Design, Architecture, Lifestyle and Trends. The Editorial Group RCS Media Group, which includes some of the main Italian newspapers, as well as monthly magazines, and book publishers, like Rizzoli, launched the magazine in 1997. Francesca Taroni, an interviewee for this case study, is the Editor in Chief of Case da Abitare. She also managed and initiated the commission represented in this case study.

Mercedes-Benz's involvement with Case da Abitare was initially by way of sponsorship. In fact, Mercedes-Benz appears as the main partner of Meet Design, a series of events and initiatives organized by the RCS Media Group to promote Italian design. Such involvement lead to a closer collaboration between Mercedes-Benz and Case da Abitare with the commissioning of 25 Italian designers under 35 years of age, for the creation of a potential Home Collection inspired by the Mercedes-Benz brand.

This commission resulted in the Streamline Carpet, which consists in a rug recalling the f top view of the mercedes benz SLS AMG model reduced to 75% of its original size (Figure 4.39), and the Torque Vases, a series of height-adjustable vases machined from solid billets of aluminium (Figure 4.40).



Figure 4.39. Streamline Carpet by Lanzavecchia + Wai

Figure 4.40. Torque Vases by Lanzavecchia + Wai

## 4.6.1 CASE STUDY 5: ANALYSIS

This case study sees car brand Mercedes-Benz and magazine Case da Abitare joining forces to commission 25 designers under 35 years old to propose household products and furniture inspired to Mercedes identity and the car world in general. Studio Lanzavecchia + Wai is among these 25. They proposed two adjustable metal vases (Torque Vases) and a carpet recalling the silhouette of a Mercedes SLS (Streamline Carpet).

Francesca Lanzavecchia hesitated to identify the commissioner. While Mercedes-Benz provided the conceptual context for the commission, it was Case da Abitare that engaged with the designers (FL0:04:00). Francesca Lanzavecchia defines the project as one with a double commissioner (FL0:12:00). Although, in the interview she states that the real commissioner is Case da Abitare that defines the general direction of the commission and is the direct interlocutor of the designers (FL0:03:06). Francesca Taroni, Chief Editor of Case da Abitare, helps clarify how this commission came to be. Mercedes-Benz was already sponsoring a series of events organized by RCS – Case da Abitare's editorial group – aimed to the promote Italian design. Mercedes-Benz also “expressed the desire to enter the design world in a

*more incisive way*”, leading Case da Abitare to suggest engaging with young talented Italian designers to “*realize a mini home collection inspired by the automotive world*” (FT0:03:07). Therefore Case da Abitare selected 25 designers under 35 years of age to contribute to a project that could “*carry Mercedes into the design world*” (FT0:04:54). The scouting for the designers started a few months before the commission through the pages of Case da Abitare magazine. The editorial staff had listed a number of young Italian designers in the April 2011 issue, whom were to be involved in this project (FT0:04:54).

The brief, provided to the designers reflected the will of Mercedes-Benz to work on a collection of furniture and household products (FL0:03:16). The brief recommends that references to brand Mercedes-Benz would not be too explicit, and it also determines certain limitations in the typology of items that can be proposed (FL0:04:50). Case da Abitare and Mercedes-Benz, in fact listed certain artefacts that the designers could propose. This is so in order to avoid having too many doubles of one typology, like many chairs and few tableware pieces (FT0:06:00). Mercedes-Benz represented an interesting opportunity for Lanzavecchia + Wai to prove that their design language – perfected through a variety of self initiated projects – could be adapted to another brand (FL0:18:00). Mercedes, the car, the engine, represented an inspiration, but also a challenge for the design vision of Lanzavecchia + Wai, whose language is so far from the world of asphalt and burnt rubber (FL0:18:00). The resulting designs reflected the context provided by the brief, tailor-made for Mercedes-Benz’s identity indeed, so that they could not be proposed to anyone else (FL0:10:34). After Case da Abitare received the proposals, a budget had been awarded according to a rough estimate of how much the prototype could have costed (FL0:06:48). It was up to the designer to then make that money suffice for this aim. Once that sum was decided Lanzavecchia + Wai approached high-profile rug company Nodus who agreed on taking care of production (FL0:15:18).

Designer Francesca Lanzavecchia has the clear sensation that the money comes from Case da Abitare, and that Mercedes-Benz has paid Case da Abitare a higher sum through its sponsorship (FL0:13:22). Francesca Taroni talks about this money as coming directly from Mercedes-Benz to the designers, instead (FT0:08:23). The two interviews are concordant in the flow of money that reaches Case da Abitare from Mercedes-Benz. This is clear as Mercedes-Benz functions as a sponsor for the entire itinerant Meet Design events series that includes the Mercedes home collection (FL0:13:22, FT02:30). Although the possibility of producing and distributing a larger series of the proposed items is always left open, such prospect – which to some extent drives Lanzavecchia + Wai to design for Mercedes-Benz – never materializes. Francesca Taroni’s interview confirms that the decisions about production and distribution of the items are up to Mercedes-Benz who holds the rights of the designs until the end of 2012 (FT0:11:37). Mercedes also has control over all the prototypes that can be exhibited in Mercedes-Benz points of sales (FT0:14:18). The fact that there had never been a clear strategy from Mercedes about the proposed designs as consumer products becomes evident to Francesca Lanzavecchia when she receives a phone call from someone responsible for Mercedes points of sale in Italy. This person asks for twenty Torque vases.

Francesca Lanzavecchia is surprised by such phone call, as – she explains – the agreement with Mercedes does not consider the possibility of the designers to produce the items beyond the prototypes (FL0:01:20). Mercedes-Benz should take care of that. In this confusion, the potential of the designs as products is never achieved. However, most of the involved designers presented “*serious and responsible*” projects, avoiding designing something provocative for the sake of capturing attention (FT0:16:42, FT0:17:52). The projects kept production issues in consideration, like the implementation of their production and reproducibility (FT0:17:52). Most projects could enter the production phase straight away. The fact that designers had to sort the *Production* of their designs by themselves impacted their final design, pushing them to take into consideration production related issues (FT0:19:14).

Contrariwise to the commercial development of the pieces as consumer products, the strategy to include the artefacts as exhibition pieces is rather well planned. The designed artefacts represent content for the Meet Design exhibitions travelling from Rome to Torino, Milan and – “*probably*” – even Tokyo (FL0:04:30). For Mercedes, as the subject of talented young Italian designers’ works, the exhibitions represented an opportunity for advertisement. The exhibitions are impressive, always held in beautiful locations, especially in Rome where the Trajan’s Market makes a beautiful scenography (FL0:11:10) (Figure 4.41 and 4.42). For Francesca Lanzavecchia, the fact that the resulting artefacts would have been included in exhibitions was clear from the beginning (FL0:09:50). Actually, this was the only certainty about the pieces. From Francesca Lanzavecchia’s words, it is possible to infer that the first Meet Design event taking place in Rome served as a deadline for the completion of the prototypes (FL0:15:18). Francesca Taroni highlights an important event held contextually to the Salone del Mobile of Milan, in which the projects were exhibited, accompanying the launch of the brand new Mercedes A-Class (FT0:14:36).

As mentioned earlier, prototyping the designed pieces is a task left to the designers. The commissioners rely on the designers network and ability to foster manufacturers. At this point one could notice that the commissioners are obtaining exhibition pieces by only paying an estimate of their production costs to the designers. So, Francesca Taroni highlights how *Visibility* has been distributed not only to designers and Mercedes-Benz, but also to the companies who, freely chosen by the designers, produced the prototypes and took part in the project attracted by the advertising possibilities (FT0:08:00, FT0:08:23).

In parallel to the artefacts and the exhibitions, a publication including all the designs was also primed. In order to enrich it with credible content, Giulio Cappellini had been invited by Case da Abitare to contribute. Giulio Cappellini is the owner of furniture company Cappellini and is known as a talent scout and trendsetter. He commented on each project and wrote the introduction of the book (FT0:17:52). Cappellini’s involvement rewards Francesca Lanzavecchia the most on a personal level. The respect she has for him results in a sense of gratitude for his words about the overall project (FL0:23:35, FL0:17:35).





Figure 4.41 and 4.42. The Streamline carpet exhibited during the Meet Design event in Rome

According to Francesca Lanzavecchia, Case da Abitare has not capitalized enough from the use of the *Images* of the projects. She imagined that Case da Abitare could feature this commission on its pages more. She even suggested that they would do that, maybe by including images of the works in-progress (FL0:22:28). The publication featuring all the projects has been made available for sales in some bookshops (FT0:17:13).

Francesca Taroni is aware of how design events like Meet Design can easily become contexts where people get involved only for the sake of *Visibility*. She is also very outspoken and critical, about brands who sponsor events only to be present in such contexts (FT0:11:01). When reflecting in general terms, *Visibility* emerges as a desirable commodity also for Francesca Lanzavecchia. She sees the possibility of capitalizing from the *Visibility* gained by the studio on an economic level. She recalls that one of the most recent commissions for Lanzavecchia + Wai came from a company based in Brazil that had seen their work on design webzine Dezeen (FL0:39:11). Also Francesca Taroni provides a similar view of the industry. She knows that possible clients monitor what is featured on Case da Abitare's pages. For Taroni it is likely that a designer featured on Case da Abitare could consequently get work from companies. For Francesca Taroni, the prestige of Case da Abitare is a part of the equation that leads *Designers* featured on the magazine to garner commissions once appearing in the Italian magazine (FT0:09:40).

Communication is therefore an important part of Lanzavecchia + Wai practice. The way the



communication images of the artefacts are conceived and designed is Lanzavecchia + Wai's work, who choose locations and concepts (FL0:21:20) (Figure 4.43 and 4.45). In order to reach the best results, Lanzavecchia + Wai prefer to rely on photographers they know personally, like Davide Farabegoli (FL0:21:20) (Figure 4.44). For Francesca Lanzavecchia *Personal Reward* comes from the world of media when a journalist interprets the studio's work beyond the description provided. This often happens with journalists outside of the design-sphere. These journalists are often more naïve and spontaneous in their comments, which results in more interesting articles for Francesca Lanzavecchia (FL0:23:41, FL0:25:33).



Figure 4.43, 4.44 and 4.45. Images used to communicate the Streamline Carpet and photographer Davide Farabegoli during the photo-shooting

## 4.6.2 CASE STUDY 5: SUMMARY

Case da Abitare provides its expertise in scouting young Italian designers and the *Visibility* of the events Mercedes-Benz has fostered the project with money. This synergy has made the commission possible. Case da Abitare in some ways is the representative for guaranteeing design quality in the commission and promote young designers (FL0:14:11, FL0:20:36). Case da Abitare selects the designers, interfaces itself with them, organizes the events and takes care of the publication. There is no earning in this commission for the selected designers, but only a budget for the production of the prototypes (FL0:06:48), but *Visibility* is profusely distributed to Mercedes-Benz, designers and manufacturers (FT0:03:46, FT0:04:54, FT0:10:46, FT0:11:37). Still Francesca Taroni reaffirms various times how providing *Visibility* was not the only aim of this commission. She explains how this collaboration could have bridged a gap between designers and the industry (FT0:04:54). However, this bridge had never been constructed in this commission.





Case Study: Torque Vases and Streamline Carpet (2011)

Interviewee: Francesca Lanzavecchia for Lanzavecchia + Wal (designer)

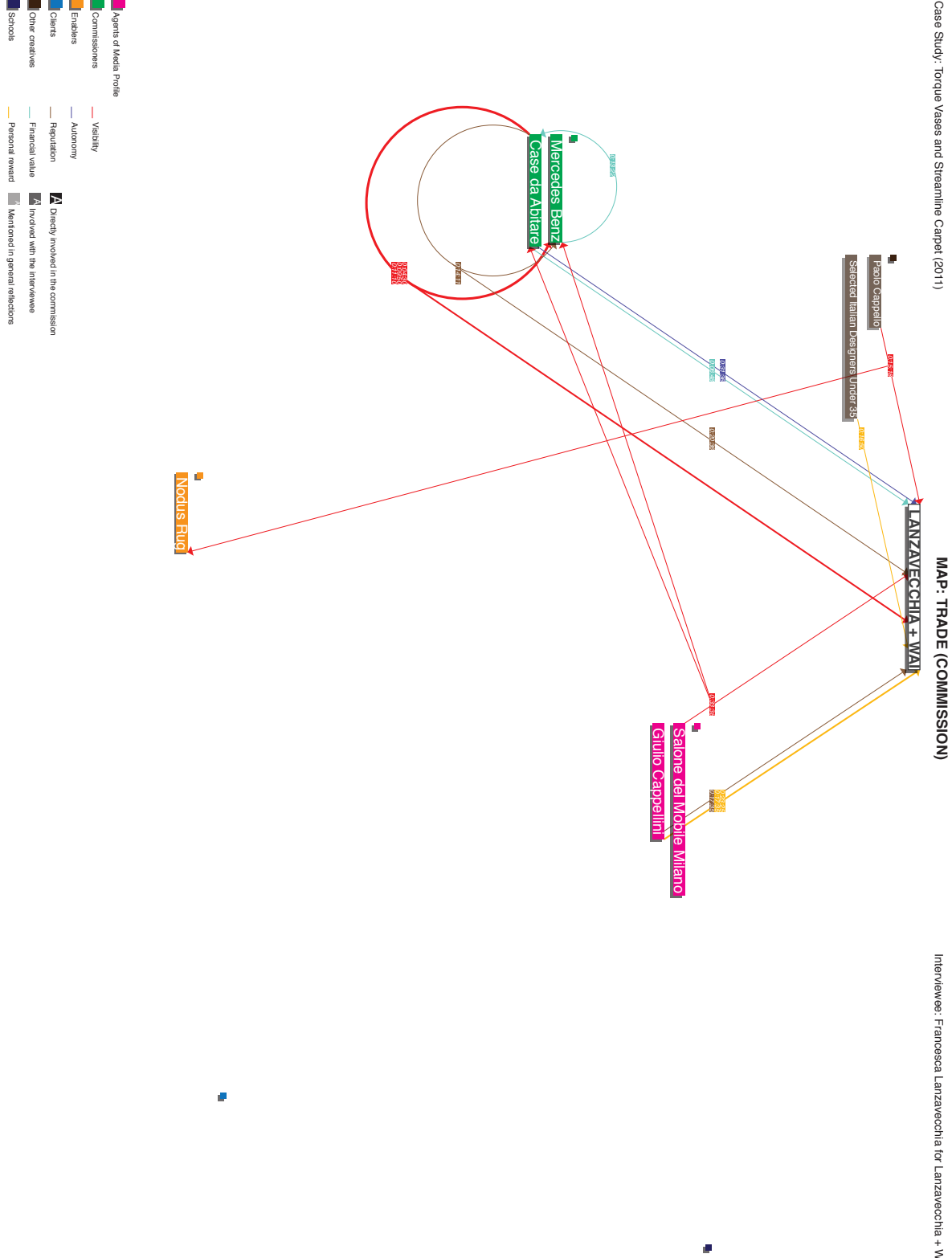


Figure 4.47  
Commission Trade Map - Case Study 5 - Interviewee Francesca Lanzavecchia

### Case Study: Torque Vases and Streamline Carpet (2011)

Interviewee: Francesca Lanzavecchia for Lanzavecchia + Wai (designer)

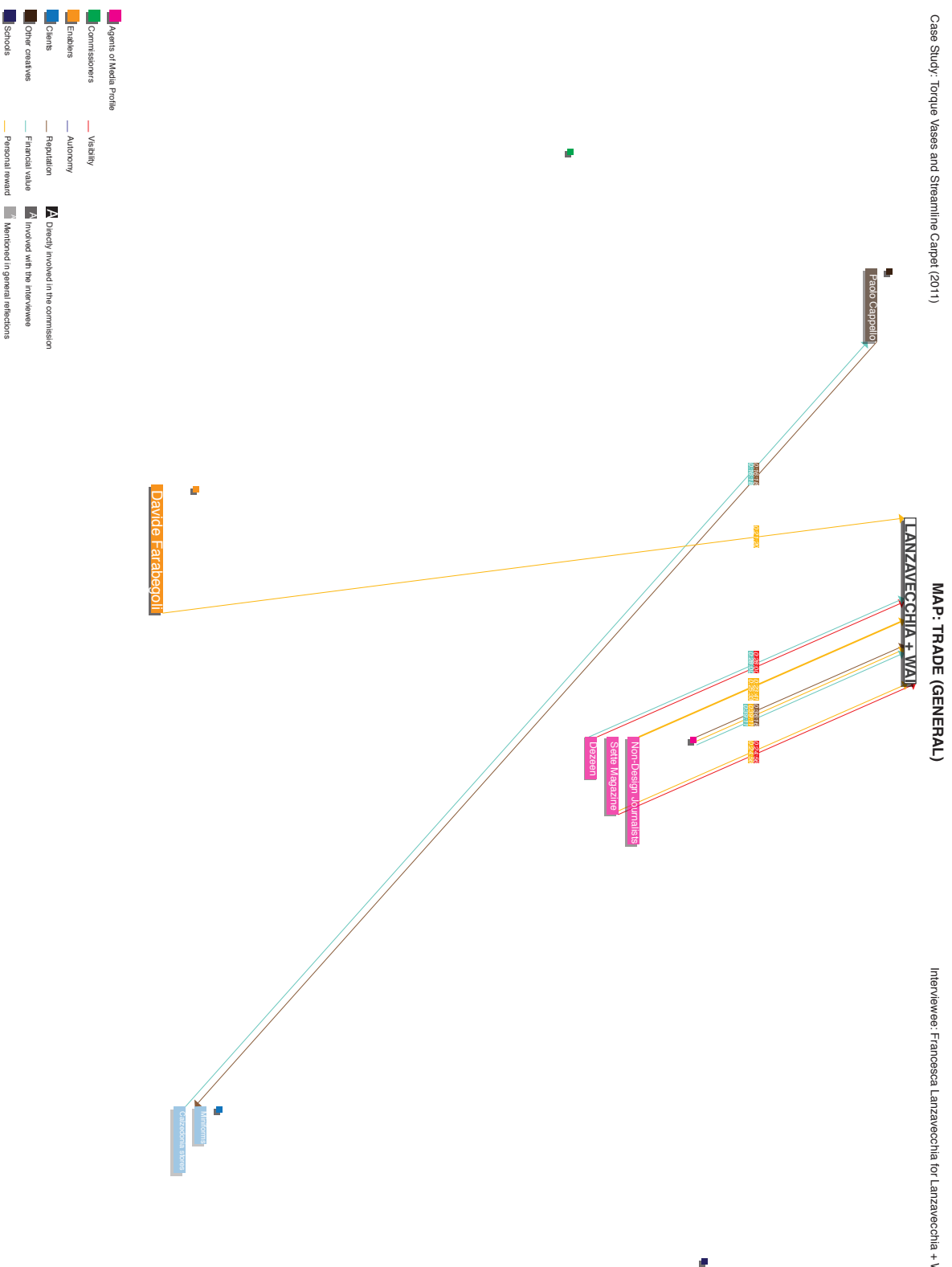


Figure 4.48.  
General Trade Map - Case Study 5 - Interviewee Francesca Lanzavecchia

Case Study: Torque Vases and Streamline Carpet (2011)

MAP: PROCESS (TRANSLATED)

Interviewee: Francesca Taroni for Case da Abitare (commissioner)

<p><b>Mercedes Benz</b></p> <p>Being Mercedes the main sponsor and heading Mercedes expressed interest in entering the world of design in a way a little more holistic than simply as a patron of a cultural event, we came up with the idea of involving the young talents of Italian design in the design of a home collection inspired to the automotive world</p> <p><b>Lanzavecchia + Wai</b></p> <p>we pulled out 25 very interesting names, that seemed natural to move where a was presented the opportunity to work on a project that could carry Mercedes in the design world</p> <p><b>Mercedes Benz</b></p> <p>we absolutely did not want to fall into a mere merchandising operation for pure commercial purposes, and to all the designers of course was asked to interpret as freely the brief reference to the automotive world and Mercedes in particular.</p> <p><b>Lanzavecchia + Wai</b></p> <p>the objects on display had all next a long explanation because the steps we're so articulated that the reference to the automotive world needed a precise caption that did release its pain from the idea to the final design</p> <p><b>Mercedes Benz</b></p> <p>no one has tried a shortcut for show. Everyone presented with 23 well-designed projects, we have chosen to prototype only a certain number.</p> <p><b>Lanzavecchia + Wai</b></p> <p>having all the designers addressed to manufacturers, they have already faced the problem of reproducibility of the object along with their producer of choice.</p> <p><b>Mercedes Benz</b></p> <p>Mercedes made available reimbursement according to the type prototype which was made</p> <p><b>Mercedes Benz</b> <b>Lanzavecchia + Wai</b></p> <p>the company reserved the right to think about what to produce and what not and then at the end of a certain date, the designers would be back in possession of their project and they would be free to go and propose to those who they deemed appropriate.</p>				
<p><b>Salone del Mobile Milano</b> <b>Mercedes Benz</b></p> <p>projects have been re-presented during the Salone del Mobile in Milan because the company wanted to make a statement about the project and the classes of Mercedes and then part of the home collection has been inserted and therefore has had great visibility during the show because as much as Roche and Turen are two interesting places they are not the fulcrum of the design scene as it can be in Milan in April.</p> <p><b>Mercedes Benz</b></p> <p>So, these prototypes are available for Mercedes until a date which I think coincides with the end of this year. If Mercedes wants to set up window displays and points of sale with those prototype can do it.</p> <p><b>Mercedes Benz</b></p> <p>In the case of Mercedes visibility was very broad, Mercedes was able to make a statement and was reported by all the publishers of Rizzoli, published in a catalog</p> <p>the entire material that they have provided is a still of quality and is collected in a video and in a book published by Skira, you can buy it in bookstores.</p>				
<p><b>Giulio Capellini</b></p> <p>I wrote in introduction what I'm telling you, that's how it all started the project. But I considered it appropriate to call Giulio Capellini, because he was the one who started the project, he was the one who designed the objects and he was kind enough to write an introduction of the project taking care to mention project by project, few words for all the designers, highlighting each time what was new in that project.</p>				
<p><b>Mercedes Benz</b></p> <p>we have involved a group of designers we had already discussed in the April issue of "Case da Abitare, we had done the research 360° trying to identify who were the Italian under-35 talent available.</p> <p>we decided to put together what had been our own editorial scouting work with a big name</p>				
<p><b>COMMISSION</b></p>				
<p><b>DESIGN</b></p>				
<p><b>PRODUCTION</b></p>				
<p><b>DISTRIBUTION</b></p>				
<p><b>CONSUMPTION</b></p>				

Figure 4.19  
Process Chart - Case Study 5 - Interviewee Francesca Taroni

### Case Study: Torque Vases and Streamline Carpet (2011)

Interviewee: Francesca Taroni for Case da Abitare (commissioner)

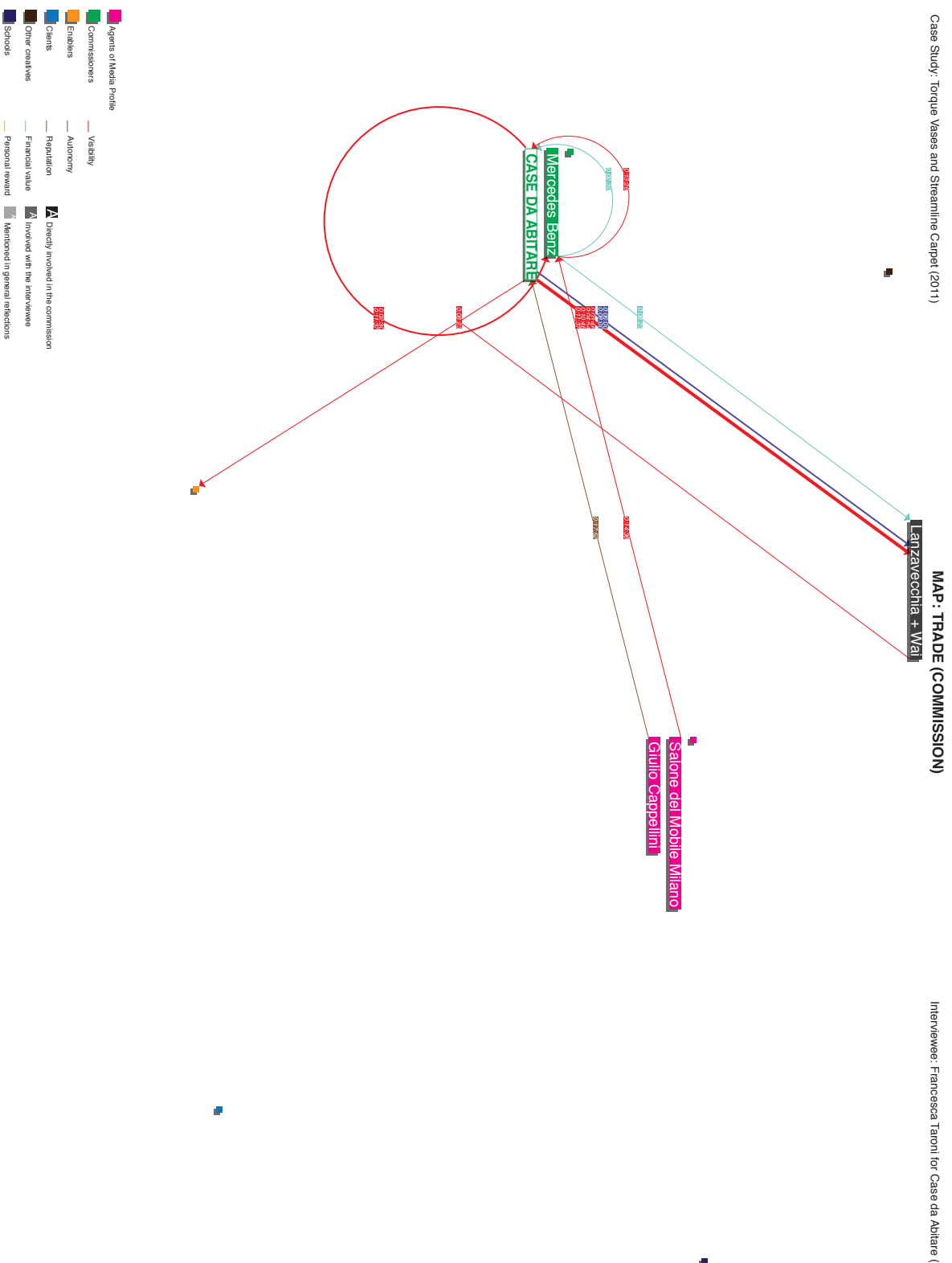


Figure 4.50.  
Commission Trade Map - Case Study 5 - Interviewee Francesca Taroni



### Case Study: Torque Vases and Streamline Carpet (2011)

MAP: TRADE (GENERAL)

Interviewee: Francesca Taroni for Case da Abitare (commissioner)

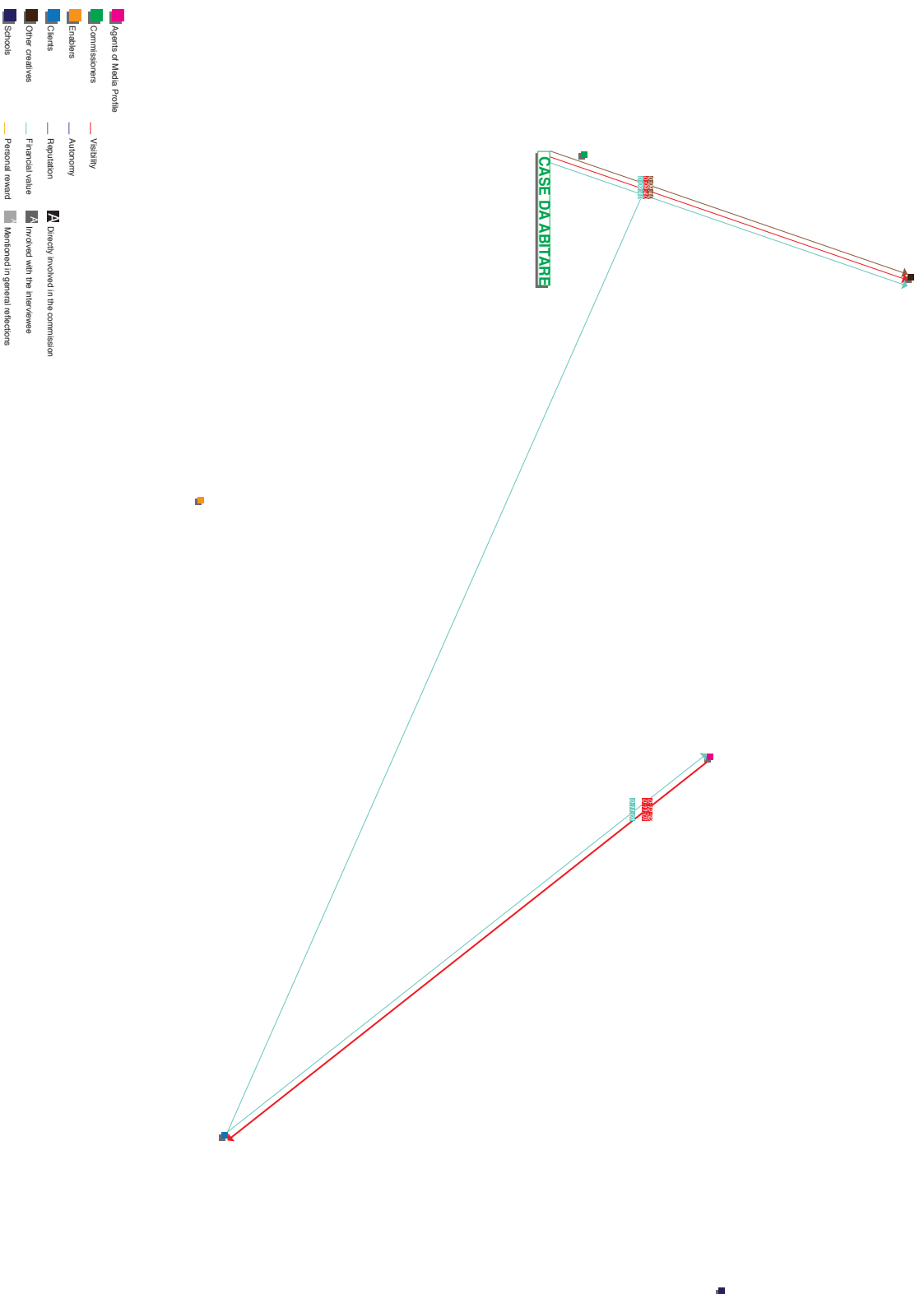


Figure 4.51  
General Trade Map - Case Study 5 - Interviewee Francesca Taroni

## 4.7 CASE STUDY 6: BOTANICA COLLECTION BY FORMAFANTASMA COMMISSIONED BY FONDAZIONE PLART

Based in Eindhoven, FormaFantasma is a practice created by Simone Farresin and Andrea Trimarchi right after their graduation from the Design Academy Eindhoven Masters in 2009. Their work is characterized by refined aesthetics with a sense of nostalgia and romanticism provided by the use of natural materials and craft processes. Projects are usually inspired by recent cultural changes, such as migration of populations, survival in times of crisis or revival of dismissed production techniques and generate furniture or homeware artefacts as outcomes. Their pieces have been exhibited in numerous fairs and events and are part of public and private collections such as Droog and the Art Institute of Chicago (Formafantasma.com, 2013).

Fondazione Plart is an organization in Naples whose aim is to inform and disseminate knowledge about polymeric materials and their use in art and design. This knowledge includes research on conservation, restoration, and cultural implications of plastic materials in our society. Fondazione Plart collaborates with an intricate network of artists, designers, architects, journalists, critics and historians on a national and international level. To disseminate its knowledge about polymeric materials, Fondazione Plart has built a permanent collection, a multi-media interactive section and it hosts exhibitions and events open to the public. Fondazione Plart is directed by Maria Pia Incutti and Marco Petroni is curator and responsible for the public relations of Fondazione Plart. Marco Petroni is also the person that has worked more closely with FormaFantasma when commissioning them for the project Botanica. That is also why he has taken part to the interview.

Botanica starts as a commission from Fondazione Plart to FormaFantasma. In 2011 Fondazione Plart has approached design studio FormaFantasma “*to create their own personal interpretation of polymeric materials*” (Formafantasma.com, 2013). Simone Farresin and Andrea Trimarchi have started the project imagining a pre-oil society that produces its own plastics by mixing natural resins, flour, egg, sawdust and other materials. The commission resulted in a series of seven vessels, one bowl, two coffee tables and a floor lamp, all featuring parts in plastic materials (Figure 4.52 and 4.53). An excerpt of the explanation provide on FormaFantasma’s website can help describing the result:

*The objects displayed in the 'Botanica' collection are designed as if the oil-based era, in which we are living, never took place. Almost as if historians, Studio Formafantasma investigated the pre-bakelite period, discovering unexpected textures, feelings and technical possibilities offered by natural polymers extracted from plants or animal-derivatives. The designers researched and hunted for information, digging into the 18th and 19th centuries, when scientists began experimenting draining plants and animals in search for plasticity. [...] The organic details and plant-like forms of the pieces underline the vegetal and animal origins of the resins, while the palette of colours is based on natural amber tones in combination with traditional materials such as wood, ceramic and metal. The natural textures and honey-like colours of the resins evoke the memory of 20th century bakelite objects, however, the finish and details are somewhat archaic yet contemporary. In 'Botanica', plastics are used as precious details, in an attempt to develop a new post-industrial aesthetic. (Formafantasma.com, 2013)*

The project has been premiered at the Spazio Rossana Orlandi during the Salone del Mobile 2012 in Milan. Spazio Rossana Orlandi represents a popular spot during the Salone del Mobile for upcoming and established designers to exhibit. Many visitors, journalists, critics and other representatives of the design industry, attend it every year.



Figure 4.52. One of the vessels of the Botanica Collection by FormaFantasma



Figure 4.53. One of the coffee tables of the Botanica Collection by FormaFantasma

## 4.7.1 CASE STUDY 6: ANALYSIS

In 2010, FormaFantasma presented the project Autarky at Spazio Rossana Orlandi during the Salone del Mobile in Milan. The project, consisting of an installation including items made of baked flour and other materials, caught the attention of Marco Petroni (MP0:23:50, AT0:06:00). Marco particularly appreciated the thinking process of Simone Farresin and Andrea Trimarchi that for the project imagined an autarkic society under embargo producing artefacts with the limited resources around them (MP0:10:00). Fondazione Plart then decides to propose a commission to FormaFantasma (MP0:23:50). The project Autarky was therefore the trigger for this commission. FormaFantasma invested in

this exhibition exactly with the purpose of attracting attention and build their reputation.

FormaFantasma are left perplexed by this invitation from an institution that promotes plastics, as their previous project Autarky was in some ways “*the opposite of plastics*” (AT0:06:00). However, intrigued by the challenge they accept (AT0:10:00). The commission does not have any direct commercial purpose for Fondazione Plart, their interest laid exclusively on the cultural meanings of this project (MP0:09:36).

For this commission FormaFantasma is only provided with a context representing Fondazione Plart's broad interests in the world of plastics (MP0:26:00). In the words of Marco Petroni, they are asked to design their own “*homage to the world of polymers*”, or as Andrea Trimarchi puts it, “*a jubilation of plastics*” (AT0:06:00, MP0:26:00). The *Autonomy* is near absolute, the only request being that, from time to time, they communicate their directions to the commissioners (MP0:26:30). That is a task that FormaFantasma undertakes by sending images suggestive of themes and moods. A man of the Amazonian forest paddles his canoe in a river of plastics and, successively, some images related to the botanic world, natural rubber and plants producing resins are some of the visuals sent by FormaFantasma to Fondazione Plart. That is enough to stir up Fondazione Plart's confidence that the project is heading in the right direction (MP0:28:00).

Presenting the outcome of the commission at the Salone del Mobile in Milan was one of the premises of the commission (AT0:10:30). Notably, the same place where commissioner and designers first met – Spazio Rossana Orlandi – is also the place where Botanica is presented one year later. The *Visibility* of the Salone del Mobile represents a big incentive for FormaFantasma to accept the commission, as the premier of the project during the Milanese festival had been in the plans since the beginning (AT0:10:30, MP0:16:00). Initially art gallery Lia Rumma would have provided the space, but as the gallery at some point stepped back, FormaFantasma was urged to propose an alternative (AT0:12:00). The alternative happened to be the space of their representative gallery director Rossana Orlandi. Spazio Rossana Orlandi is an epicentre of activity during the Salone del Mobile in terms of *Visibility* and this event served as a deadline for the project as well (MP0:16:00).

In order to undertake this commission, FormaFantasma received a lump-sum payment that they had to make suffice for the design and production of the artefacts, the exhibition including plinths and graphics, the transportation, and administrative costs to Milan, as it also emerged from the shadowing activity illustrated among the preliminary studies (AT18:48:00, AT0:10:00). The production of the artefacts is done by FormaFantasma in their studio (AT0:14:46). Also the design of the exhibition was up to the designers and Andrea remembers that they exceeded with exhibiting samples of the materials and drawings, which were “*unnecessary*” (AT0:28:00). Although Botanica collection is easily describable as a series of artefacts, Andrea Trimarchi in the interview points out that “*the project was more of an installation than physical objects*” (AT0:05:28) (Figure 4.54 and 4.55). This remark is

representative of the fact that for the designers it was always crucial – also during their design process – that the project would work well when exhibited. Also the production of press releases is done within the studio. FormaFantasma is very careful with having control over their communication, so they prepare press releases in such way that journalists can copy-paste from those. However, FormaFantasma also appreciate when journalists add something to the provided content (AT0:30:00). The *Images* distributed by the designers to press have been taken by professional photographer Luisa Zanzani under the direction of FormaFantasma who chose the location and organized the photo shooting. Only the photographer's fee absorbed about 10% of the total budget available to undertake the commission (Figure 4.56).



Figure 4.54 and 4.55. Parts of the installation at Spazio Rossana Orlandi during the Salone del Mobile of Milan



Figure 4.56. The image of Botanica collection taken by Luisa Zanzani and used for communication by FormaFantasma and Plart

The premier at Rossana Orlandi's venue during the Milan's Furniture Fair 2011 resulted successful, attracting the attention of visitors, critics and media. The network providing

*Visibility* arose while or after the commission was being undertaken. MoMA curator Paola Antonelli and Herald Tribune writer Alice Rawsthorn, the Art Institute of Chicago, all echoed the project as they became aware of it (MP0:16:00, AT0:29:15). Marco Petroni recalls that Domus magazine even published about the project twice (MP0:16:00). This resonance and international recognition was in the wishes of Fondazione Plart who requested that its name is credited with the project as it is exhibited or published (MP0:31:15).

The first edition of *Botanica* is property of Fondazione Plart who exhibits it and gives it on loan to other institutions (AT0:14:46, MP0:30:00). For Fondazione Plart this is important because it makes circulate the name of Plart (MP0:37:15). To a considerable extent the circulation of the project is to be addressed to FormaFantasma who keep contact with media representatives and exhibition venues. In addition to the contact of Rossana Orlandi, most of the later exhibitions derive from FormaFantasma's contacts (AT0:15:12). This matches the commissioner's wish as with this project they aimed for the circulation and promotion of Fondazione Plart's name. The full exhibition as shown at Spazio Rossana Orlandi has never been presented again. It has been replicated in smaller versions, instead with only two or three pieces in galleries around the world and exhibition venues (AT0:14:00, AT0:17:15). Taking part to exhibitions is a crucial part of FormaFantasma's practice, it "*is an important tool*" to circulate their name and work, but it is also a demanding duty for logistics and production (AT0:15:40), as Andrea Trimarchi puts it, "*it is a bit like when a pop star goes on a tour*" (AT0:15:40). And just like music tours, taking part in exhibitions implies certain costs for FormaFantasma. That is why FormaFantasma have recently decided that when someone requests their pieces for exhibition, a payment for shipping, administrative issues and for the production of new pieces is required. This decision was made after having observed that a lot of uncovered costs would derive from participating in the exhibitions (AT0:16:00). FormaFantasma have turned their participation in exhibitions from a necessary cost to promote their work, to a source of income derived by loans. Most likely, the money they request does not represent their biggest source of income, but at least it moves entry in exhibitions from the expenses list to the earnings list. FormaFantasma independently choose the exhibitions to take part to, and deal with the organizers.

Marco Petroni is quite clear how Fondazione Plart benefitted from this commission in terms of *Reputation* and *Visibility*. The strong association created between Fondazione Plart and the *Botanica* project allows it to receive a share of the recognition that FormaFantasma receives in other contexts like "*museums, galleries, exhibitions, and media from magazines to blogs*" (MP0:37:15). When the project is well received by the design community— as in the case of *Botanica* — the name of the commissioner accesses all the contexts where the project is hosted or discussed. In this particular case study this mechanism works successfully. With this project, Fondazione Plart realized that by commissioning designers to produce original content, rather than by hosting exhibitions of known projects, the payback in terms of *Reputation* is higher (MP0:31:55). By acting as a commissioner, Fondazione Plart's intuition in selecting the right designers as well as its ability to carry on the project all the way to



interesting results is acknowledged (MP0:39:32).

This *modus operandi* reflects the way Fondazione Plart establishes its collaborations. Fondazione Plart represents the context that commissioned artists or designers have to confront with. Designers and artists are left free to take their own stand on the theme surrounding plastics when commissioned by Fondazione Plart (MP0:34:00).

Reflecting on FormaFantasma's recent commissions, Andrea Trimarchi mentions the projects that the studio was working on, at the time of the interview, for Vitra Design Museum and Fendi. He realizes that those commissions are ideal, as they do not come from the commercial departments of those brands, but rather from their cultural units (AT0:20:58). These commissions are not targeted at putting products on the market, but rather at exploration purposes. It has to be said that the outcome of the commission for Fendi then represented the Fendi exhibition at Design Miami/Basel in 2012. Marco Petroni highlights the “*allure*” (MP0:20:50) surrounding FormaFantasma. This quality, which is hard to define, provides a “*cultural image*” that probably is evident in their appearance in the media and at exhibitions (MP0:20:50).

## 4.7.2 CASE STUDY 6: SUMMARY

This case study covers the commission of Fondazione Plart – the museum of plastics in Naples – and design duo FormaFantasma. The commission gave birth to *Botanica*, a collection of vessels realized with natural resins mixed with other materials. *Botanica* speaks about what was before plastics were invented. With its sleek aesthetics it questions whether an alternative to oil could be a possibility. For Fondazione Plart, this commission serves as a way to put itself on the map of design. The strategy is relatively simple, though with a high coefficient of risk. Identified as upcoming designers, FormaFantasma, is placed in the optimal economic conditions to produce original work about Fondazione Plart area of competence – the world of polymers. The work is then presented at a known venue during the Salone del Mobile of Milan. Fondazione Plart's name is always credited with the work leading it to spread and become known. Interestingly, FormaFantasma, who also have an interest in making the work visible in the design world fosters the further exhibitions of the resulting collection *Botanica* in order to build a *Reputation*. The designers' interest in occupying important stages in terms of *Visibility* and *Reputation* is also one of the factors that pushes them to accept the commission in the first place. Initially it was Lia Rumma gallery, which then had been replaced by Spazio Rossana Orlandi. These places have a certain *Reputation* within the art and design community, especially during the Salone del Mobile where they are reference places for the visitors.

The way Fondazione Plart operated is risky because it fully relies on the network that is generated after the project is put out. However, in this case the project is well received and spread in design media and events. This is certainly attributed to the quality of the project, but also the connections of designers and commissioners. FormaFantasma in particular have built an appealing image for themselves, as Marco Petroni recognizes. The project does not aim for a direct commercial earning, but rather it serves as a campaign for Fondazione Plart.











Figure 4.59.  
General Trade Map - Case Study 6 - Interviewee Andrea Trimarchi



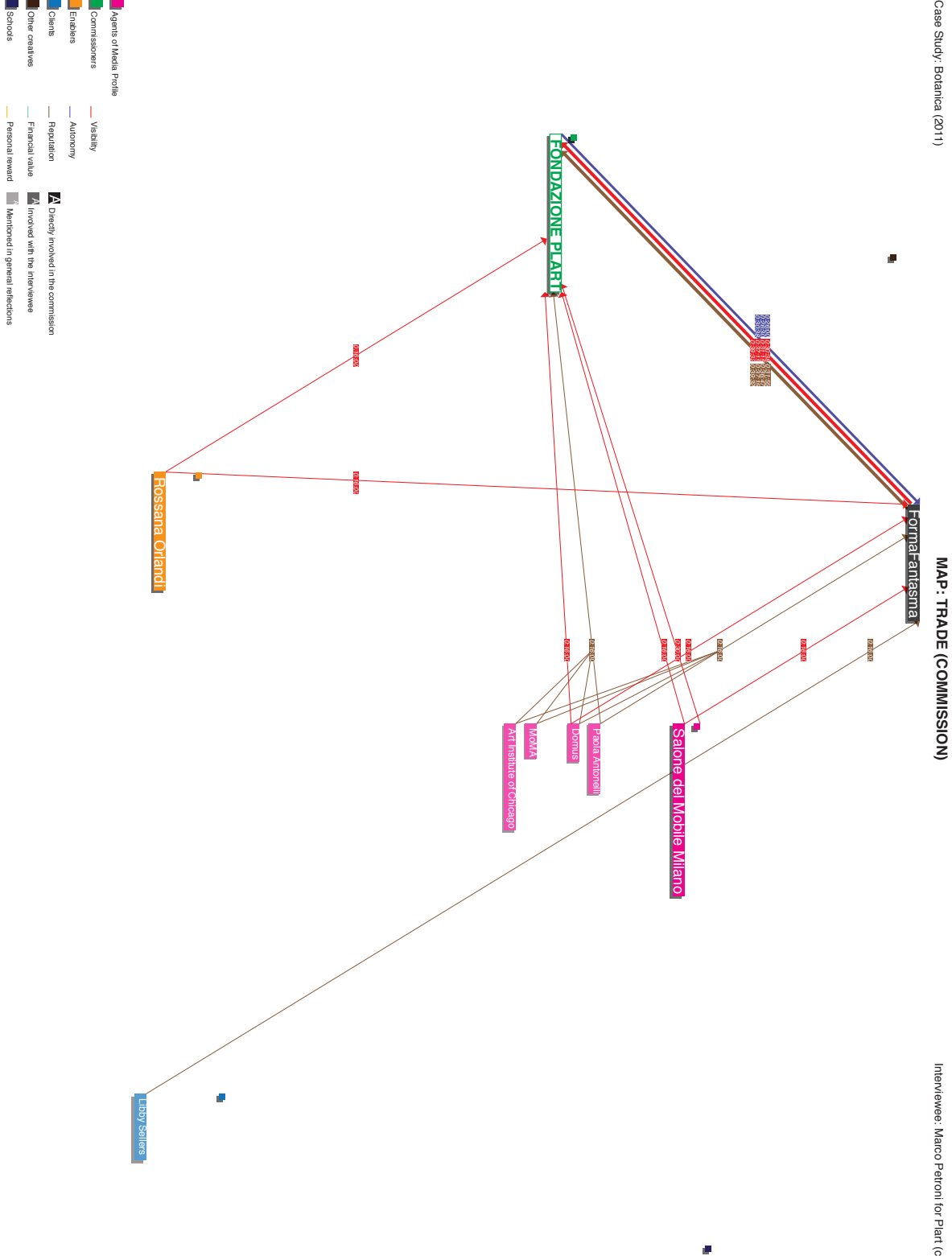


Figure 4.61.  
Commission Trade Map - Case Study 6 - Interviewee Marco Petroni

### Case Study: Botanica (2011)

MAP: TRADE (GENERAL)

**Interviewee:** Marco Petroni for Plart (commissioner)

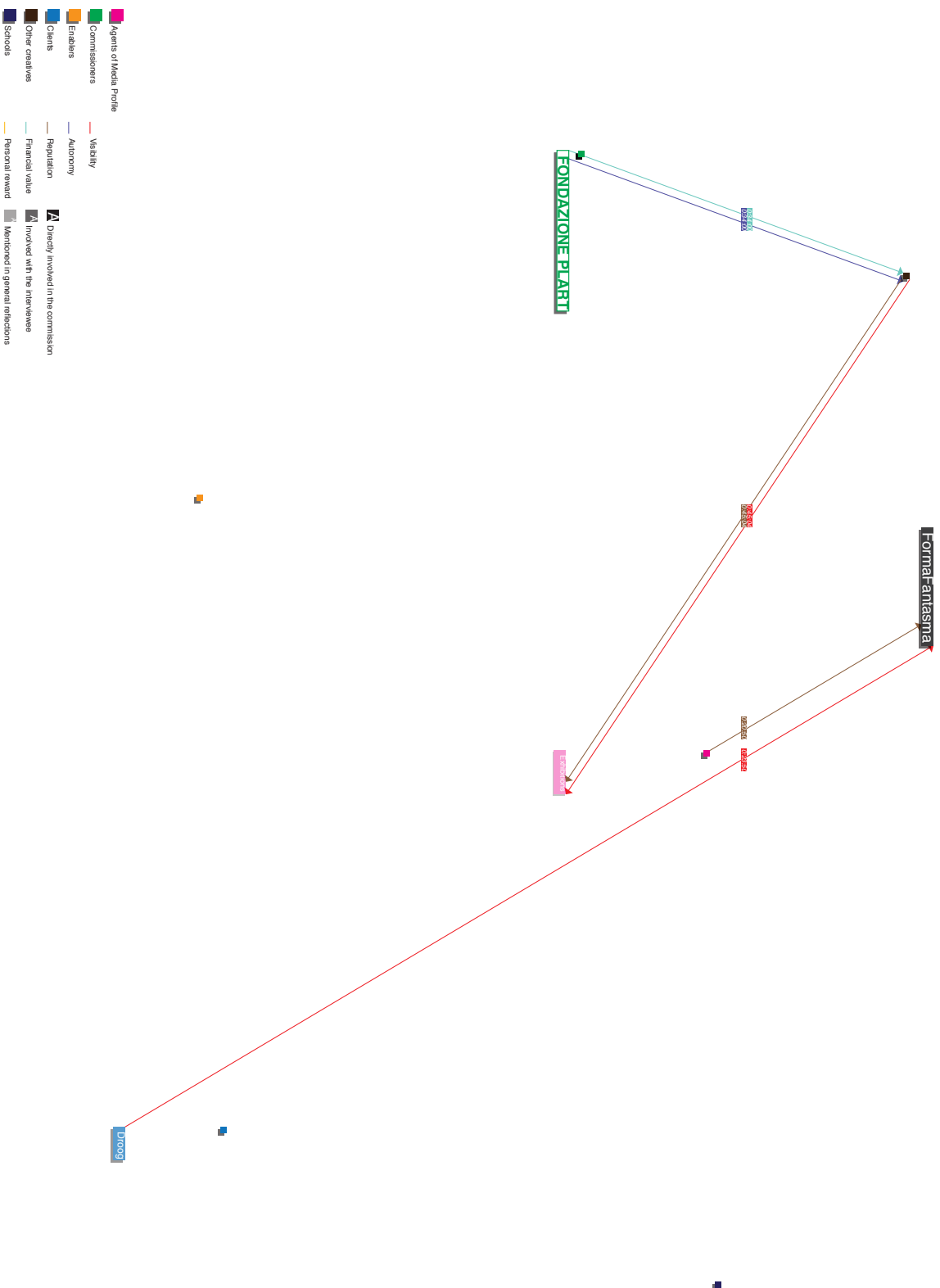


Figure 4.62.  
General Trade Map - Case Study 6 - Interviewee Marco Petroni

## 4.8 SUMMARY

This chapter has illustrated the six case studies representing the main study. After each designer and the corresponding commissioning party have been briefly introduced, the relevant information deriving from the interviews have been included in this chapter. Additionally, this information has also been visualized as described in the methodology chapter. So each case study has originated four *Trade Maps* and two *Process Charts*, representing the trade occurring within the commission and the process through which the commission developed respectively. The six case studies have been treated here separately so to highlight the peculiarities of each of them, bringing a wealth of information in the study. For instance, case study 1 highlights the care of designer Chris Kabel in portraying his project for art institutions Witte de With and Tent. Case study 2 describes the way a design performance can help the *Visibility* of a project, its designers and commissioner. Case study 3 proves the reputational benefits that commissioning gallery Droog has from an award assigned by magazine Wallpaper to the mirror designed by Minale-Maeda. Case study 4 shows how designer Hella Jongerius manages a network of enablers and provides *Visibility* on the media, thanks to her relationship with media representatives. Case study 5 is a commission originated by Mercedes-Benz, that in collaboration with magazine Case da Abitare selects and commands young talented designers to develop content for an exhibition bearing its name. Case study 6 states that for a cultural institution, commissioning original work to young designers serves as identity and a promotional campaign. These are, obviously, only a few of the aspects that the case studies bring and have been described at length in the chapter.

Bringing together the six case studies, the next chapter expands the information while relating about the findings that can be deduced.





# **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS**



## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the results of the six case studies. The discussion highlights and makes sense of the significant aspects that emerged from the analysis phase. The construction of the findings derives from a double action. One can be said to be mainly quantitative, based on the visualizations of each case study, through a process of agglomeration of the data and visuals. The analysis phase has led to twelve *Process Charts*, of which six result from the interviews with the *Designers* and six from the interviews with the *Commissioners*. Additionally, 24 *Trade Maps* trace the trade occurring within the commissions and generally in the industry. Of these twelve derive from the interviews with the *Commissioners* and twelve from the interviews with the *Designers*. Such wealth of data, already analyzed individually by case, can be further developed in visualizations that sum all the six case studies. This process of interrelating and ordering all the information serves as a guide through the results of the case studies, indicating what phenomena in the process and trade are more related about by the interviewees. But, as the case studies are richer in quality, on parallel with this quantitative analysis, the qualitative value of the data is kept in higher consideration to allow truthful interpretations. It is therefore in qualitative terms that the findings are identified and presented.

This chapter leads the reader through the reasoning on the results deriving from all case studies and culminates with the deduction of the findings.

## 5.2 FINDINGS

The case studies have been observed through two aspects: the process for undertaking the commission and the trade occurring in the general context of the design industry and the specific one of the commission. In the next two sub-sections, this separation has been maintained.

### 5.2.1 PROCESS

By merging the twelve *Process Charts* deriving from interviews with designers and commissioners and substituting the quotes in the charts with black rectangles with low opacity, a new chart including all the interviews is generated (Figure 5.01). This *Process Chart* has the objective of guiding the reader through the phases of the process the interviewees relate the most about. The chart shows a descending trend across the frame in the way the interviewees relate about the process of undertaking the commissions. Thus foreseeing a progressively shift of attention from the *Piece* to the *Image*, throughout the process of undertaking the commissions. In this section it is analyzed how the commissions progress through their three outcomes, which consist of the *Piece*, *Display* and *Image*.

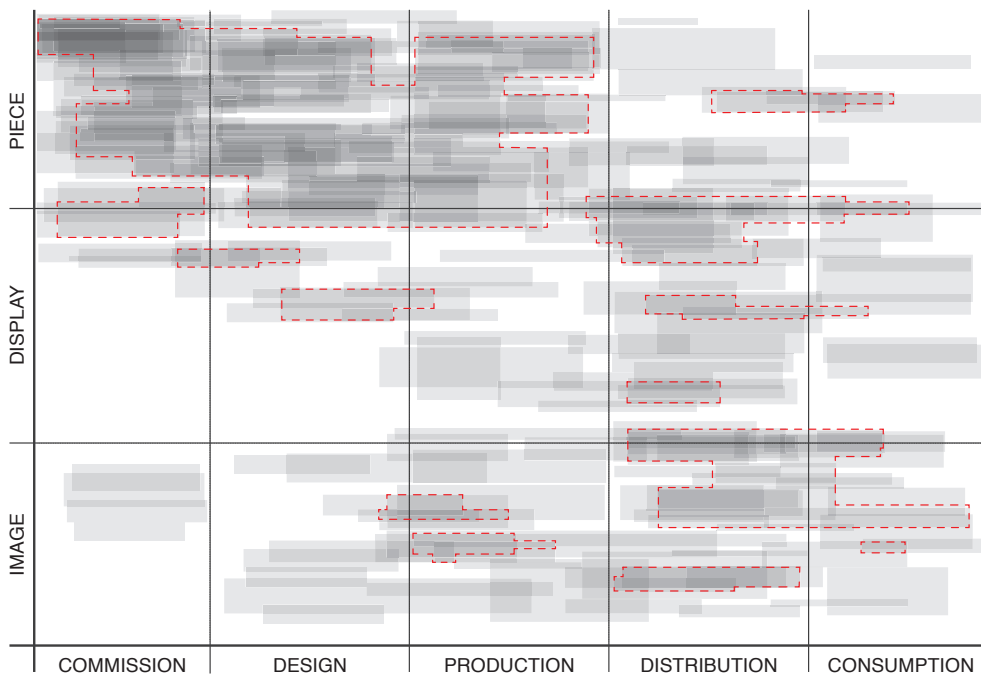


Figure 5.01. The Process Chart comprising data from the six case studies, highlighting the areas where information is more dense

### 5.2.1.1 THE PIECE

The first and most evident observation while looking at the *Process Chart* (Figure 5.01) is that commissions always start with the presumption of an artefact, which is then designed and produced. That is why the first three quadrants, which contain the quotes about the *Commission*, *Design* and *Production* of the *Piece*, are the most occupied ones.

The interviews have revealed that there are several reasons sparking a commission. Sometimes it is the need for artefacts to sell like in the case of galleries Carwan and Droog, or publisher Phaidon Press who developed the strategy of pairing a monographic book with a limited edition item. Some other times the *Commissioners* are concerned with projects that would define their identity as part of an ongoing research or for communication purposes. Therefore, it can be observed that, in this context of design, sale is not always the reason for *Commissioners* to engage with *Designers*.

That is the case of Mariette Dölle of Tent who considers Chris Kabel's assignment as "*fundamental research*" (MD0:09:28) for the art institutions Witte de With and Tent. Such research is represented by the commissioned designer's work on the empty atrium in the building hosting art institutions Witte de With and Tent. Similarly, Fondazione Plart was genuinely interested in FormaFantasma's "*personal homage to the world of plastics*" (MP0:26:00) and to show it at the furniture fair of Milan. This research shows that *Commissioners* prefer to let *Designers* free to formulate their interpretation on given broad contexts, rather than assigning them precise problem-solving tasks. This aspect appears also in the case study of Mercedes-Benz and Case da Abitare who selected a number of designers to take on Mercedes-Benz' identity and develop it into a home collection to present in a touring exhibition. From the case studies, it emerged that briefs for the *Designers* are very open; they could rather be considered as general contexts or themes for the *Designers* to interpret.

The design works are usually conceived in great autonomy, the designers are let free to think of what to design. Mariette Dölle says Chris Kabel was given "*150% autonomy*" (MD0:22:09), Emilia Terragni of Phaidon describes as "*total*" (ET0:23:09) the creative independence granted to Hella Jongerius. In the case of Lanzavecchia + Wai and Mischer'Traxler, the commissioners suggest a list of possible outcomes. This is for two reasons: firstly, other designers are involved in developing a collection for the commissioner and therefore too many doubles of the same typology of items would not be welcome. Secondly, the commissioners Carwan Gallery and Mercedes-Benz presume a commercial future for the collection, thus involving the possibility of selling the pieces afterwards through their network. In such cases, proposing artefacts beyond the scope of the commissioner would be problematic. But such guidance from the *Commissioners* appears as rather loose and it can be stated that *Designers* generally conceive their creations in autonomy.

The completion of the *Piece* is entrusted to the *Designers*. In most cases the designers take

care of the *Production*, find those who can help with the making of the artefacts and keep contact with them. Through the interviews, it emerged how FormaFantasma produce the designed objects within the studio, Lanzavecchia + Wai and Chris Kabel find manufacturers independently from their commissioners and sort out the *Production*, which is paid from the budget made available by their commissioner. Hella Jongerius imposes a specific manufacturer and lets the commissioner Phaidon Press agree on a price with them. Only Minale-Maeda and Mischer-Traxler are supported by their commissioners who actively helps them to find the right producers, or that imposes a specific craftsman, as in the latter case.

As interviews dig into the *Distribution* and *Consumption* of the *Piece*, information becomes more rarefied. Galleries are mentioned as the ones in charge of distributing the artefacts as goods to be purchased. This is the case for Chris Kabel, who benefits from his collaboration with Parisian gallery Galerie Kreo. Galerie Kreo appears again in the commission between Hella Jongerius and Phaidon Press. Here Galerie Kreo functions as a consultant providing the contacts of collectors who usually buy Hella Jongerius' creations. FormaFantasma mention the fact that the *Pieces* are sold through galleries. Francesca Lanzavecchia speaks about how the responsible of Mercedes-Benz stores would have liked to sell the *Pieces* through the network of shops, but that was not possible because Mercedes-Benz did not choose to produce the *Pieces* beyond the prototype. Information about *Distribution* and *Consumption* of the *Piece* is generally scarce and often referred to failed plans, rather than actual sales and use of the artefacts. So it can be observed that the *Distribution* and *Consumption* of the *Pieces* as objects for purchase and use are peripheral aspects to the commission.

In relation to the *Piece*, the findings are:

- Commissions begin with the presumption of an artefact.
- The *Commissioner* is not always involved with the sales of the pieces. Commissions are often sparked by identity, research or communication purposes. Therefore the *Distribution* and *Consumption* of the artefacts as objects for purchase and use are peripheral aspects to the commission.
- Briefs are very open, they could rather be considered as general contexts or themes for the *Designers* to interpret, with such freedom the *Pieces* are conceived in autonomy.
- The *Designers* are usually the ones in charge of *Production*, either directly or by finding the right producers.

### 5.2.1.2 THE DISPLAY

The *Display* of the artefacts plays an important role in the *Distribution* of the commission outcomes. However, looking at the *Process Chart*, it is noticeable how the *Display* and the *Piece* blend into each other, with many statements of the interviewees occupying the intersection between the two tiers (Figure 5.02). This occurrence deserves some attention.

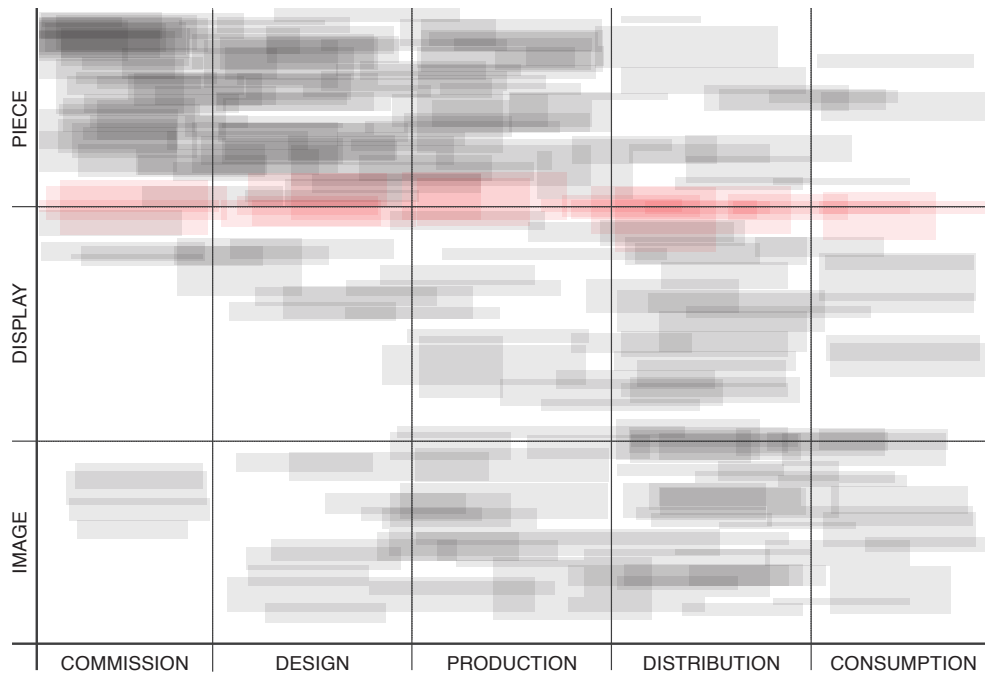


Figure 5.02. The Process Chart comprising data from the six case studies, the quotes concerning both the *Piece* and the *Display* appear highlighted in red

The fact that some statements fall between the tier concerning the *Piece* and the one concerning the *Display* is symptomatic of the crucial role played by design events in the *Commission*, *Design* and *Production* phases of the *Pieces*. The case study of Minale-Maeda and Droog is explicatory of the strong relation between the *Piece* and the *Display*. In fact the participation of Droog in the Salone del Mobile of Milan and Design Miami/Basel is the main reason for commissioning Minale-Maeda. For the first event, Droog approached the designers to propose them the commission. As Marielle Janmaat explains:

*“For Milan’s project “Saved by Droog” we had the brief and we had a pool of products [...], we presented the all package to a group of designers, which was selected of course.” (MJ0:12:00)*

In proximity of Design Miami/Basel instead, it was Minale-Maeda who proactively suggested the project to Droog. A quote from the interview with Mario Minale describes the proactive attitude of the designers in proposing projects in concomitance with design events:

*“For Basel [...] we told them [Droog]: “why don’t we do something with the material we developed for Saved by Droog?” And they [Droog] have accepted our first proposal.” (MM0:22:00)*

The critical role of design events in commissioning the *Designers* appears again among the other case studies. Fondazione Plart includes the participation to the Salone del Mobile of Milan within the offerings for the commission. Similarly Mercedes-Benz and Case da Abitare propose the project to the designers with the essential aim of including the outcomes in the Meet Talents itinerant exhibition, while a commercial future for the artefacts is only a



possibility. Similarly, Carwan Gallery approaches Mischer'Traxler with a calendar of design events in the Middle East. Therefore it can be stated that the participation to design events is made explicit at the beginning of the commissions. In fact, in some cases it can be observed that if there were no design event (i.e., Design Miami/Basel, Salone del Mobile of Milan), there would have probably been no commission. To a certain extent, it can be stated that design events often represent the main reason for commissions to take place.

The *Display* of the artefacts is therefore one essential part of the commission, even affecting the *Design* and *Production* of the *Pieces*. This is evident in the commission between Droog and Minale-Maeda. The designers explain how the Dusk / Dawn mirror bearing high quality finishing and a concrete frame, has been possible only because of the participation of Droog to the exclusive event Design Miami/Basel. The thin line separating the Piece from the *Display* becomes even blurrier when Andrea Trimarchi of FormaFantasma describes Botanica as:

*“an installation more than physical objects.”* (AT0:05:28)

The fact that the commission started with the idea of being exhibited in Milan, pushed the designers to think of it as an exhibition, thus featuring samples, illustrations and the artefacts. Commissions are therefore about artefacts, as much as about exhibitions and the *Pieces* have to be adapted to the venues that will host their *Display*. Hence, design events have an impact on the *Design* and *Production* process. Consequently, the artefacts become collectible items as well as exhibition props.

As the participation in events is an important purpose for the artefacts to be commissioned, the calendar of events also dictates the deadlines by which the *Pieces* have to be ready, thus further blurring boundaries between the *Display* and the *Piece*, as shown by the *Process Chart* (Figure 5.02). In this context of design, design events serve as deadlines for the commissions to come to completion. Such deadlines are often met only a few days before the openings. That is the case for Mischer'Traxler, FormaFantasma and Lanzavecchia + Wai, as it emerged in the interviews.

The considerable importance of the *Display* within the process of undertaking the commission, leads to a careful preparation and organization of the participation to exhibitions and participations. Two cases related the most about the development of the *Display*. Mischer'Traxler talk about their performance at Design Days Dubai, instigated and pursued by the director of the festival. The performance saw the two designers and the craftsman assembling together one of the Gradient Mashrabiya sideboards. However, that was just *“a bit of a show”* (MT0:09:26) for the audience and press, rather than the true production process for the Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard. Andrea Trimarchi of Formafantasma talks instead of how the show at the Salone del Mobile of Milan 2011, had to be re-organized several times when the possible host Lia Rumma stepped back and left commissioner and designers without a venue. Finally, the designers provided the contact of Rossana Orlandi who hosted

the premier of the Botanica collection. Emilia Terragni of Phaidon Press remembers that Hella Jongerius is also the author of the installation featuring the 300 vases, which arranged in a donut-like shape form what Hella Jongerius calls the Wheel of Colours. The act of displaying the design outcome requires itself a *Design* and *Production* process, the organization of the opening and other logistical and administrative issues.

The *Display* of the artefacts is an important way to make the project circulate. This aspect emerges in all case studies. Emilia Terragni of Phaidon Press declares that the 300 Coloured Vases are given as a loan to other museums in its totality or only few pieces. Similarly, Marco Petroni enjoys seeing the Botanica collection travelling through exhibitions, as a whole or as single pieces. More explicitly, Mariette Dölle of Tent, states that the fact that the bench could be transported to various venues determined its success as a commission.

The importance of circulating the project through exhibitions is reinforced by Andrea Trimarchi's words:

*"It's a bit like when a pop star goes on tour."* (AT0:15:40)

Both commissioner and designers enjoy how the collection then travels through other venues, thanks to FormaFantasma's contacts. Just like organizing the tour of a pop star; managing the lending of the artefacts is a tedious and demanding job, usually undertaken by the designers. FormaFantasma find themselves fixing and reproducing the *Pieces* that come back damaged from exhibitions. They have therefore learned to ask for a fee to those who host the exhibition. Also Mischer'Traxler, tired of investing in taking part to exhibitions recently started to do the same.

Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte of Carwan Gallery blends the connotation of design events as point for *Display*, into the one of points of sale. He mentions the importance for a gallery that does not have a physical space to select the right fairs and museums where to exhibit and sell *Pieces*. Carwan Gallery carefully select the events and museums where to place their collection. The sales occur contextually to the fairs also for Droog. Similarly, FormaFantasma's sales occur through exhibitions in galleries. So the selling of the *Piece* frequently occurs within the *Display* context, where the exhibition pieces sometimes become products for sale. Consequently, exhibitions can be points of sale. This aspect justifies again the blurred separation between *Display* and *Piece* in the *Process Chart*. At the same time it reinforces the fact that the project is meant to circulate through the *Display* in various exhibitory contexts.

*Consumption* of the display includes Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte's statements about Arab royals attending the fair in Dubai, as well as Marielle Janmaat of Droog remembering the "*fancy people*" (MJ0:29:27) enjoying the Dusk / Dawn mirror at Design Miami/Basel, which contrasts with the satisfaction of Mario Minale when engaging with the ordinary people

visiting the Salone del Mobile. The *Display* reaches a broad audience that varies from the wealthy collectors to the ordinary visitors who enjoy design exhibitions. The popularity of design events allows them to transversally cross the social fabric of the hosting cities, design exhibitions finally reach the ordinary people as well as the elitist classes.

In relation to the *Display*, the findings are:

- Design events are one of the reasons why commissions take place. Sometimes the nature of the event can even affect the *Design* and *Production* process, dictating deadlines and the quality of the materials.
- *Display* requires design, organization and production. All these operations make the management of the *Display* a demanding job.
- Exhibitions reach the ordinary people that come to visit the exhibitions as well as the elite of buyers.

### 5.2.1.3 THE IMAGE

The *Process Chart* shows how the interviewees relate about the *Image*, especially in relation to its *Design*, *Production*, *Distribution* and *Consumption*. The number of quotes in the lower tier relating about the *Image* throughout the process phases, denotes the importance that is given to the visual outcome of commissions (Figure 5.03).

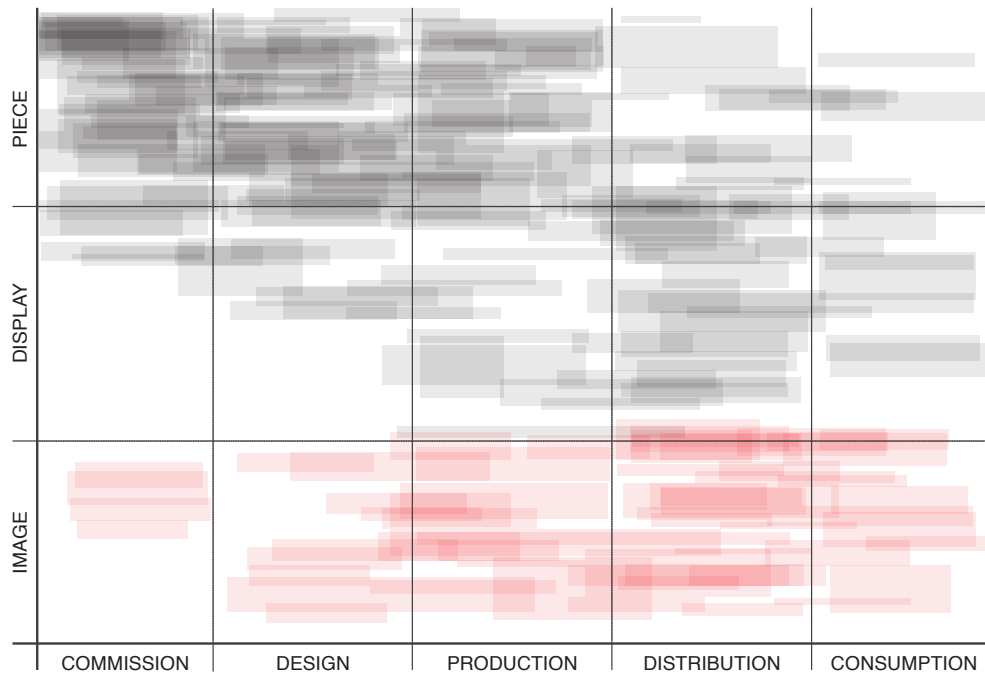


Figure 5.03. The *Process Chart* comprising data from the six case studies, the quotes concerning both the *Image* appear highlighted in red

The interviews revealed that the *Designers* are often directly involved in the photo shoots. This justifies the conglomerated statements in the *Image* tier of the *Process Chart*, between the *Design* and *Production* phases. Statements there derive from several case studies and in particular from the ones of Chris Kabel, Minale-Maeda and Mischer'Traxler. The picture of Mischer'Traxler's project, used in the publication prepared by the commissioner's media-partner BrownBook, is taken by Katharina Mischer. This photo, which the craftsman Roger Tome concentrated on assembling the Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard, has been taken during a performance at festival Design Days Dubai, in 2011. The image cannot be considered a portrait of the sideboard, since it does not even appear as finished in those pictures. Also the images taken by Chris Kabel of his Wood Ring Bench or those of Botanica by FormaFantasma and the Streamline Rug (Lanzavecchia+Wai) are more than just portraits. Mariette Dölle of Tent and Chris Kabel reflect on how the documentation picture produced by the institution's photographer was refused by Chris Kabel. Chris Kabel preferred to invest in photographic equipment and take his own picture of the Wood Ring Bench as the other one "*wasn't selling the idea well*" (CK0:13:15). Mariette Dölle reflects on how those pictures are iconic and part of the design. The resulting photograph finally adopted by both designer and commissioner is an image of the piece seen from above, a perspective that no one would have in real life, as commissioner Mariette Dölle notices. Also Francesca Lanzavecchia and FormaFantasma take care of the *Production* of the *Image* of their projects, though they prefer to work with trusted photographers for that, organizing the photo-shoot, choosing locations and the concepts for the desired images. During the shadowing activity at FormaFantasma's studio described in the preliminary studies in the chapter three, it has been possible to observe the process that has led to the image populating the media. Formafantasma hired a photographer Luisa Zanzi, carefully selected the location and styled the setting with props and plants to underline the concepts of the project. Lanzavecchia + Wai behaved in a similar way, hiring photographer Davide Farabegoli. For the Streamline Rug inspired by a Mercedes SLS, they chose to place the carpet on the asphalt of a parking lot with burned tires marks. For other photographs, Lanzavecchia + Wai chose the side of a countryside road with one of the designers lying underneath the carpet shaped with the silhouette of a Mercedes SLS, as if the designer was fixing it from underneath.

There is one project that is particularly focused about its *Image*; that is the collaboration between Phaidon Press and Hella Jongerius. This collaboration, since its conception required the generation of an artefact and of a book about the artefact. That is why this commission generates quotes placed in the *Image-Commission* quadrant of the *Process Chart*. Also in this case the visual representation of the project, in the form of a book, captivated the attention of the designer. In order to achieve the best results, Hella Jongerius requested the involvement of graphic designer Irma Boom. Emilia Terragni of Phaidon Press relates at length about the process of designing and making the book, the concepts behind it and the negotiations with designers and printers to achieve the desired results. The book tries to replicate the meanings of the collection of vases. Colours and imperfection are among the aspects that graphic designer Irma Boom highlights through the organization and binding of the publication.

Finally, it can be observed that designers are generally in charge of the *Image* of the design outcome. They craft the *Image* with the same care of the *Piece*, conveying meanings and concepts of the project. That is because the *Image* has to iconically communicate the idea, not realistically portrait the *Piece*.

The care of the *Designers* in crafting their media profile emerges in the words of Hella Jongerius who demands the right magazine, right context and right interviewer. Chris Kabel, who for the opening at Galerie Kreo, hires a writer to write his profile, remarks the care dedicated to prepare his communication in the best way. FormaFantasma who explicitly say they prepare their press releases so that any journalist or blogger can copy and paste them, granting them full control, make the same remarks. *Designers* are very dedicated in concocting the communication about their designs and their profiles in a way that is effective. *Designers* are very careful in the way they interact with the media. Beyond *Production* and *Design*, *Designers* are also involved in the *Distribution* of the *Image*. *Designers* appear to be the gateway to the media. Chris Kabel uses the postcards printed by Witte de With and Tent bearing the image of the Wood Ring Bench to update his contacts, starring MoMA director Paola Antonelli among others. The network of the *Designers* is extended and includes important actors within the design industry. Mario Minale's interview confirms this aspect. The interesting part about the image of Minale-Maeda's Dusk / Dawn Mirror lays in its distribution on Wallpaper magazine as the mirror is awarded as best mirror 2011 by the Wallpaper editorial team. Such an award is a result of Minale-Maeda's dissemination of their updates through their network, which includes the editor of Wallpaper. The award, about which also Marielle Janmaat of Droog happily relates, is therefore a consequence of Minale-Maeda's contacts. While shadowing FormaFantasma and having access to their emails as part of the agreement, one episode confirming the communicative power of the *Designers* occurred. A commissioner of a project the studio had just completed asked FormaFantasma whether they could make sure of being published on a certain design website, as the commissioner previously attempted that without success. FormaFantasma replied that it was not a problem, and the project was published on the website short after.

If the *Display* of the artefacts is a way to reach a large audience, ranging from the highbrow collectors to the naïve passer-byes, the image is an even a more powerful tool in that sense. The quadrant about the *Consumption* of the *Image* includes statements ranging from the joy of Chris Kabel when the image of his Wood Ring Bench goes on a popular newspaper; to his commissioner's satisfaction in seeing the audience of Witte de With and Tent expanding to the people interested in Chris Kabel's project. From the thoughtful reflection of Mario Minale who shares his awareness on the fact that the people reached by Wallpaper magazine, are not the same ones who could afford his designs; to Emilia Terragni's observations on how well the experience of browsing the book Misfit reflects the meanings of the project. Generally, the *Image* is a powerful tool to reach the people way beyond the scope of the *Piece*. The *Image* is a common tool for reaching the ordinary world and –to put it like Chris Kabel – “*permeates*” the lives of people (CK0:30:38).

In relation to the Image, the findings are:

- *Designers* are usually in charge of the *Image*. They craft the *Image* with the same care of the *Piece* so that the *Image* iconically conveys ideas and meanings, rather than realistically portrait the *Piece*.
- *Designers* are the gateway to the media.
- The *Image* is a tool for reaching people and enters the ordinary world.

## 5.2.2 TRADE

In order to get a complete view on the trade occurring in the industry the interviewees are involved in, the *Trade Maps* deriving from the interviews with *Designers* and *Commissioners* have been merged. First, the twelve *Commission Trade Maps* (six deriving from interviews with *Designers*, six from interviews from *Commissioners*) have been roughly overlapped (Figure 5.04). Then, the same has been done with the twelve *General Trade Maps* (Figure 5.05). This way of proceeding led to two very intricate maps, hard to decipher and make any use of (Figure 5.06 and 5.07)

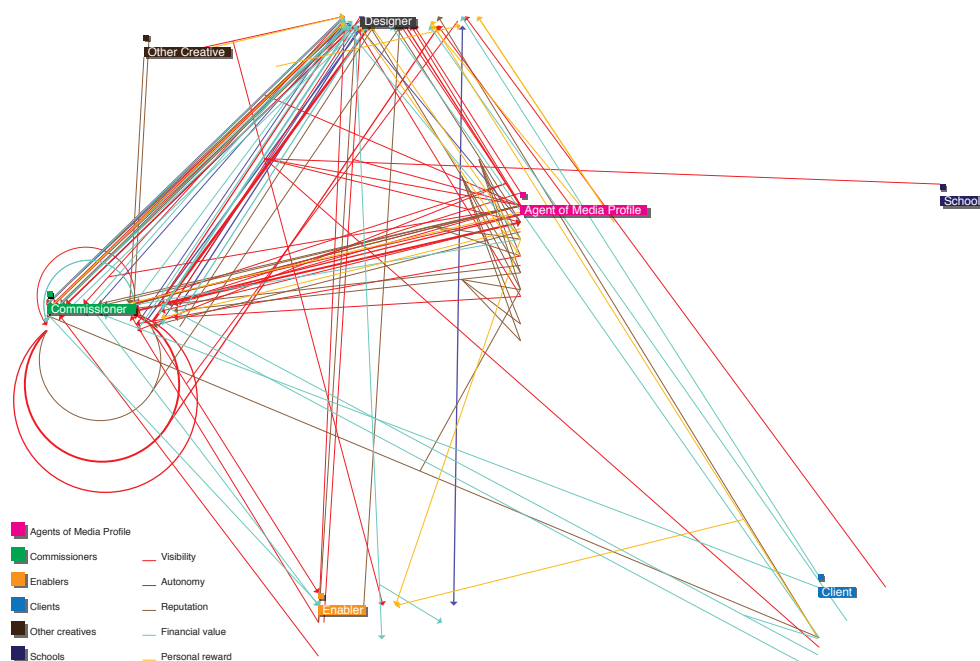


Figure 5.04. The twelve Commission Trade Maps roughly overlapped



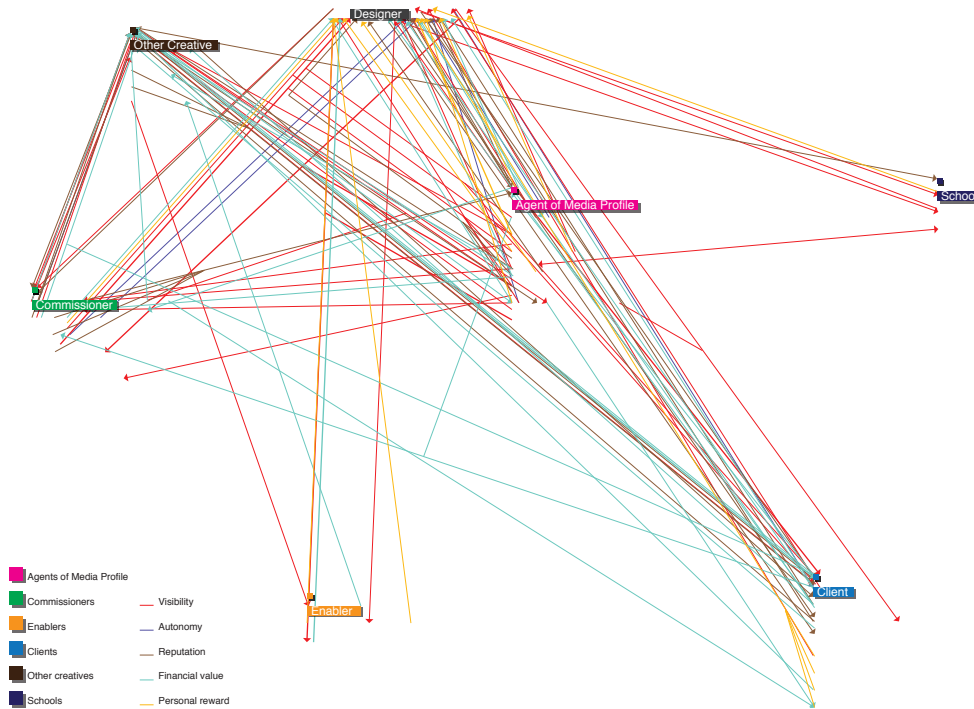


Figure 5.05. The twelve General Trade Maps roughly overlapped

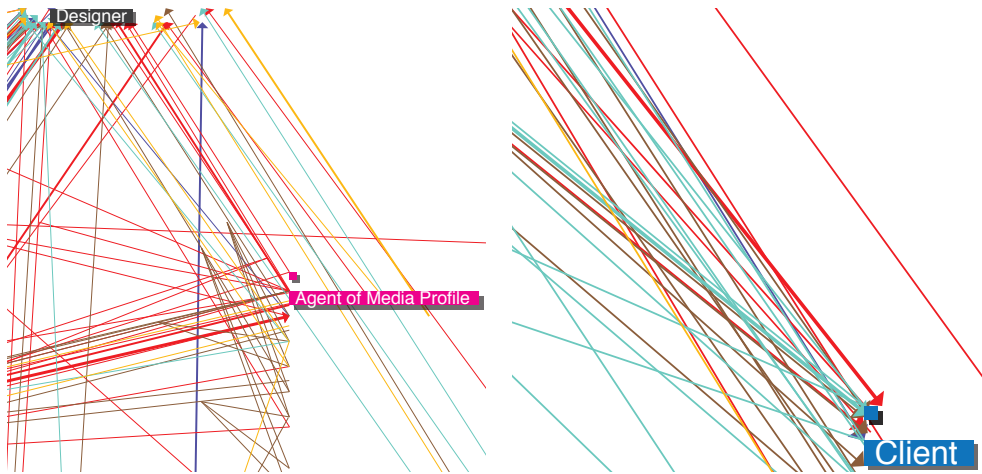


Figure 5.06 and 5.07. Details of the overlapped Commission and General Trade Maps

In order to make the maps readable, the arrows indicating trade among actors have been aggregated (Figure 5.08 and 5.09). The thickness of the arrows is proportional to the amount of statements about each trade, just as previously seen for the individual case studies. The same process has been repeated for the twelve maps concerning the interviewees' general observations on the design industry. This process has generated two maps: one about the commissions (Figure 5.08) and one about the industry in general (Figure 5.09). At a first glance, the two maps look very different from each other. The *Trade Map* about general trade (Figure 5.09) show a diffused trade across all actors, while the *Trade Map* about the commissions (Figure 5.08) has a more ordered exchange amongst parties of the network.

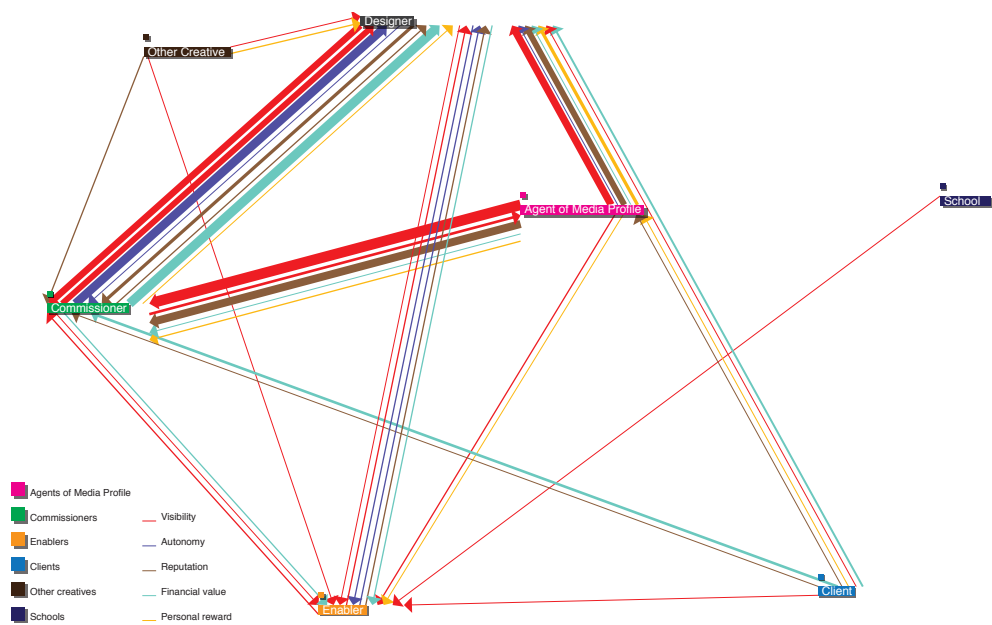


Figure 5.08. The Commission Trade Map comprising all six case studies

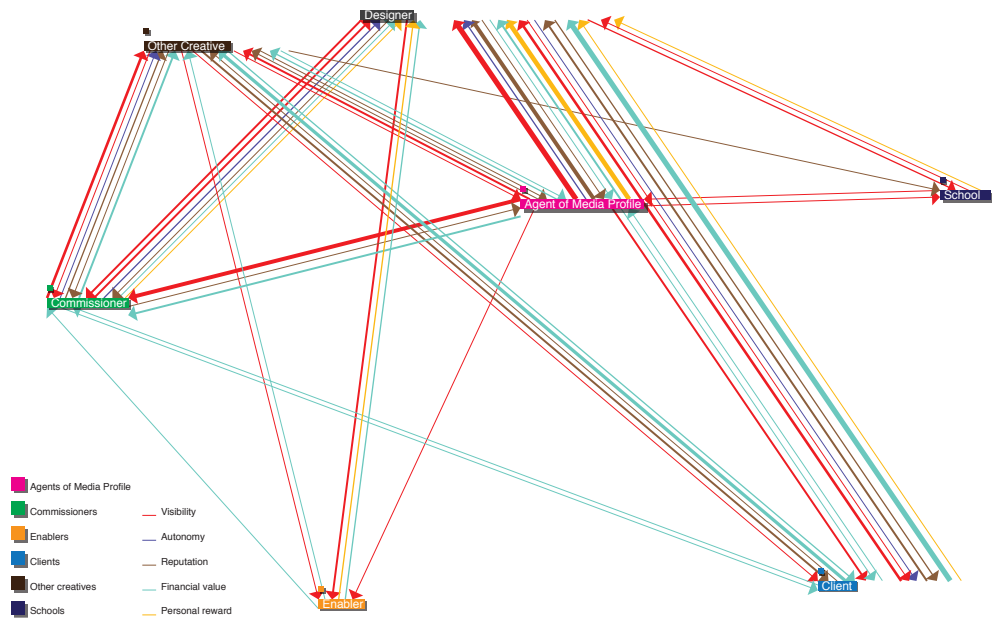


Figure 5.09. The General Trade Map comprising all six case studies

There is a reason why the *General Trade Maps* resulting from interviews with *Commissioners* and *Designers* look so spread out. In fact, the *Commissioners*, when reflecting on the industry, relate more about the relationship between them and *Other Creatives*, while the *Designers* relate about their relationship with other *Clients* than the *Commissioners* involved in the pivotal commissions selected for the case studies. In order to overcome this incongruity and



simplify the visualizations, an aggregation across the actors in the network has been operated. More specifically, it has been noticed that the *Other Creatives* mentioned by the interviewees are also designers, including designers Dirk van Der Kooij, Jasper Morrison, Kostantin Grcic, among others. Therefore the *Other Creatives* could be merged with the *Designers*, for these conglomerated maps. Furthermore, *Clients* and *Commissioners* are both beneficiaries of the designs and are almost indistinguishable when general reflections on the industry are made. For example, when Chris Kabel mentions furniture company Moooi in relation to the Flames chandelier he has designed, it is unclear whether the designer offered the project to Moooi or Moooi commissioned Chris Kabel to design an item. That is why the *Clients* have been merged under the *Commissioners* label. *Enablers*, *Schools* and *Agents of Media Profile* could not be assimilated to any of the existing categories and were left independent (Figure 5.10 and 5.11). After this operation, the *General Trade Map* and the *Commission Trade Map* became compatible. Hence they could be compared and merged in one final map (Figure 5.12). The *Trade Map* shown in Figure 5.12 unifies all the data from the interviews with *Designers* and *Commissioners* about the general and the commissions.

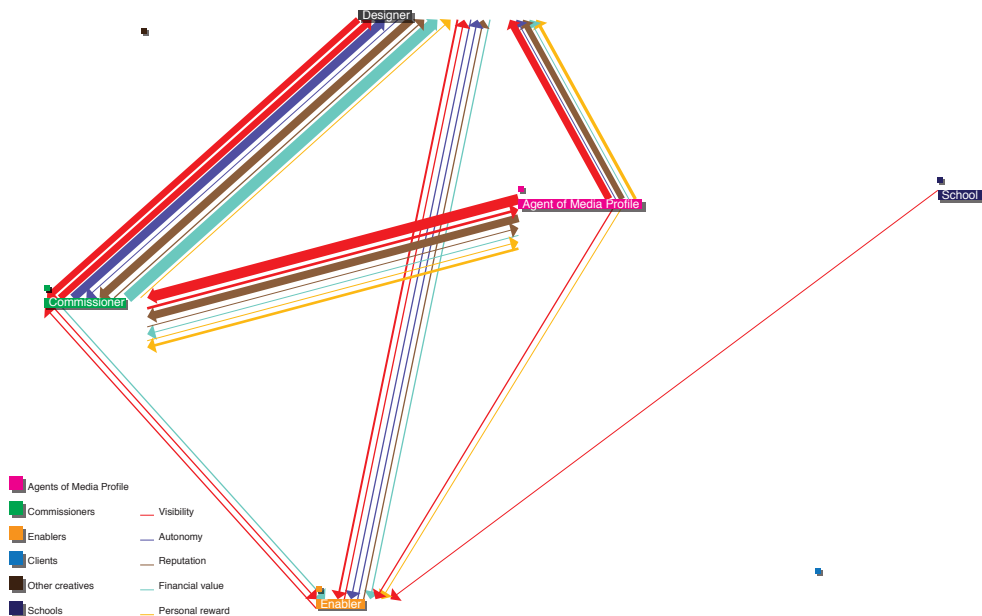


Figure 5.10. The simplified Commission Trade Map in which *Other Creative* and *Designer*, as well as *Commissioner* and *Client*, have been merged

The resulting map has a value on a quantitative and qualitative level, and it is now discussed in both terms. This map will be used as a sort of index to discuss each commodity independently, whether that is *Autonomy*, *Financial Value*, *Reputation*, *Visibility* or *Personal Reward*.

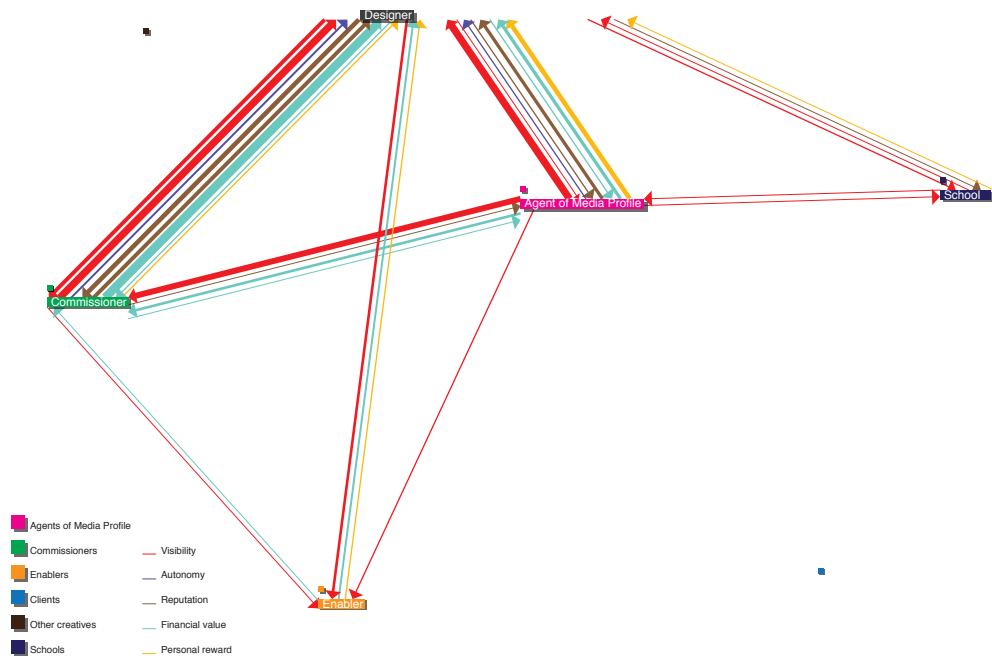


Figure 5.11. The simplified General Trade Map in which Other Creative and Designer, as well as Commissioner and Client, have been merged

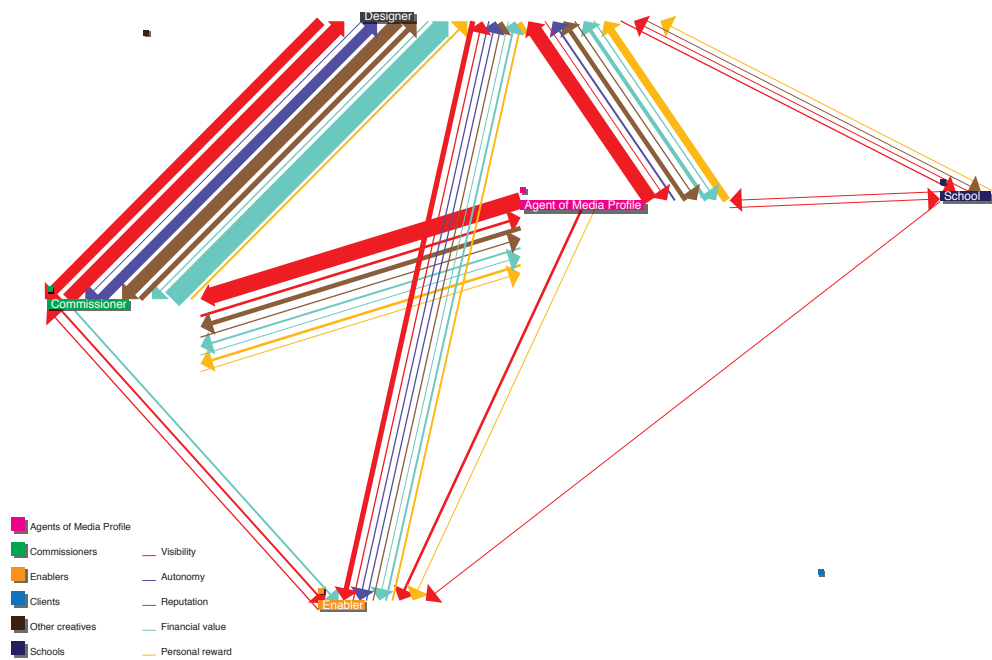


Figure 5.12. The Trade Map comprising the simplified General and Commission Trade Maps

### 5.2.2.1 AUTONOMY

*Autonomy* appears evident in the trade between *Commissioners* and *Designers*, with its direction going from the former to the latter (Figure 5.13). Every case study has highlighted a remarkable *Autonomy* allowed to the *Designers*. The *Autonomy* is most often of a creative nature. Thus meaning that *Designers* were often let free to propose whatever outcome they wanted. In Lanzavecchia + Wai's, Mischer'Traxler's and Minale-Maeda's cases some limitations were provided, like lists of possible outcomes, the use of a certain craft (as the Mashrabiya technique in Mischer'Traxler's case) or of a specific artefact as a starting point (as the rescued unsold mirror in Minale-Maeda's case). However, *Designers* admitted that they could have asked their *Commissioners* to change or expand those limitations. Furthermore, the given limitations were more like suggestions rather than proper instructions. Designers Lanzavecchia + Wai, Mischer'Traxler and Minale-Maeda received a list of items already present in the collection or a list of possible outcomes covering all the typologies of furniture and household products. Such recommendations are far from limiting and undeniably allow great *Autonomy*, if compared to the obligation of working towards a specific typology or object. The *Autonomy* granted to the designers is even more evident in Chris Kabel's, FormaFantasma's and Hella Jongerius' case, thus validating the idea that *Designers* in this context of design are given enormous creative *Autonomy*.

Beside this creative *Autonomy*, in three cases also a commercial *Autonomy* was agreed upon. Commercial *Autonomy* translates in the possibility for the *Designers* to use the outcome of the commission for his or her own purposes. Chris Kabel and FormaFantasma were let free to propose their projects to their network of galleries and brands, without their commissioners claiming any percentage of the earning. Also Lanzavecchia + Wai would be given the possibility of exploiting the project independently, unless Mercedes-Benz decides to produce and sell their designs before the end of 2013. Therefore, it can be observed that *Designers* are often let free to develop commercial strategies for the outcomes of the commissions independently.

Finally, also a managerial *Autonomy* can be discerned from the case studies. A managerial *Autonomy* consists in the freedom of choosing the collaborators to undertake the commission, independently. This is very evident in Hella Jongerius' case. She imposes a manufacturer, a graphic designer and a writer to complete the project. Also Lanzavecchia + Wai are asked to find the manufacturer independently. The same is for FormaFantasma and Chris Kabel. Similarly, Minale-Maeda conduct their seek for a producer and propose it to Droog. The case studies have proved that *Designers* often provide the network of *Enablers*. The only exception to this statement is represented by Mischer'Traxler's case, where the network of producers depends entirely to commissioner Carwan Gallery. However, this commission represents an exception also to Mischer'Traxler's modus operandi, as they admitted that this was the first time that they were "*just the designers*" (MT0:03:13), not having to bother about producing or finding those who could produce the Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard.

The creative *Autonomy* granted to the *Designers* translates into projects that reflect the identity of the *Designers* within the broad contexts offered by the *Commissioners*. Furthermore, letting the *Designers* work with *Enablers* chosen by them frees the *Commissioners* from having to provide the networks of producers and collaborators. On an economic level, leaving the *Designers* free to trade the artefacts after the commission is undertaken and presented, is part of the offering that can make the commission more appealing to the *Designers* and push them to invest in it.

Creative *Autonomy* can also derive from the participation to elitist design events where the exclusivity of the event allows some *Designers* to opt for the best materials and finishing without worrying about costs. This is made explicit by Mario Minale when relating about the Dusk / Dawn Mirror being designed for Design Miami/Basel. Also when Mario Minale reflects more generally on the industry, he clarifies the role of design events in providing opportunities for *Designers* to propose their on-going independent research to possible *Commissioners* who are planning to exhibit. This confirms to an extent what already observed in the *Process Chart* about design events having an impact on some design decisions of the *Designers*.

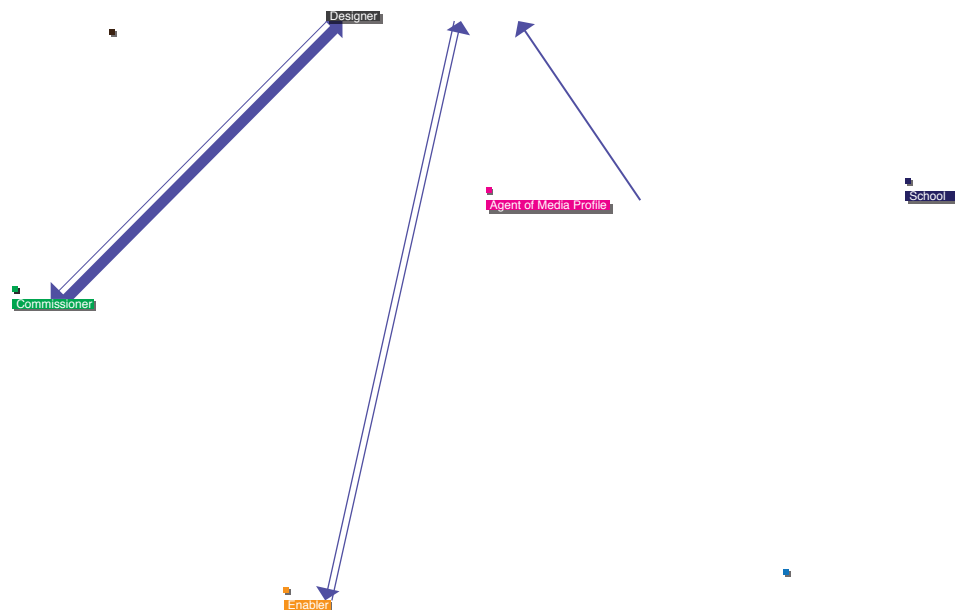


Figure 5.13. The Trade Map showing the exchange of *Autonomy* among actors

The findings concerning the circulation of *Autonomy* are:

- *Designers* are given of great creative *Autonomy*.
- *Designers* are often let free to develop commercial strategies for the outcomes of the commissions independently.
- *Designers* are often free to propose or provide the network of *Enablers*.
- *Design* events can have an impact the *Design* and *Production* of the *Pieces*.

### 5.2.2.2 FINANCIAL VALUE

In the *Trade Map* that groups all the information deriving from the interviews, the thick turquoise arrow that from the *Commissioners* points to the *Designers* stands out clearly (Figure 5.14). As turquoise stands for *Financial Value*, if one merely looks at the map, it would seem that *Designers* are earning a lot of money from commissions of sort. That is not the case. For a deeper understanding of this exchange, it is necessary to remember that *Financial Value* does not always correspond to earnings. In some cases it is the support in terms of expertise and time that the *Commissioners* make available to the *Designers*. This is the case for Droog that supports Minale-Maeda in finding the best producers for example. In most cases, however, the *Financial Value* illustrated in the *Trade Map*, corresponds to the budget made available by the *Commissioners* to the *Designers*. Such budget is mostly used by the *Designers* to cover production costs. Chris Kabel for example, explains how the 8.000€ budget provided by Witte de With and Tent, needed to be integrated with a sum from his own pocket to achieve the desired results. Also Mercedes-Benz and Case da Abitare granted a budget to Lanzavecchia + Wai so that they could approach the manufacturer they preferred for the Streamline Carpet and Torque Vases. The same goes for FormaFantasma, as observed during the shadowing activity. FormaFantasma, once given of the lump-sum amount sorted out design, production, photography and transportation to Milan for the Salone del Mobile. Similarly, Hella Jongerius was given a sum of money that she managed for herself, writer Louise Schouwenberg and graphic designer Irma Boom.

The only *Designers* mentioning a payment from their *Commissioners* are Mischer'Traxler who correspond a royalty of 25% of the sale price for each Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard retailed. As the final *Trade Map* saw the merging of *Commissioners* and *Clients*, the thick arrow indicating *Financial Value*, includes also the sales of the *Pieces* occurring after the commissions have been completed. Thus meaning that the earning generated by the sales of Chris Kabel's Wood Ring Bench through galleries are there too. And so are the sales of Botanica editions after the first one was given to Fondazione Plart. The cases of Chris Kabel and FormaFantasma highlight the strategic thinking of the *Designers*, who understand the commission as an opportunity rather than an earning. In fact, they use the budget made available and eventually even invest more money in the project, in order to make a first prototype. The prototype is necessary for the premier exhibitions, but also to later approach the galleries in their network to explore a possible commercial future for the project. So the thick arrow indicating *Financial Value* reveals indirect earnings deriving from commercial exploitations after the commissions are completed. The flow of *Financial Value* shows that *Designers* need *Commissioners* to carry on with their activities, in terms of initial budget to make the prototype. The *Designers'* strategy of designing something to be sold afterwards is enabled by two key factors: budget and *Autonomy*.

Apart from the arrow going from *Commissioners* to *Designers*, it is worth noticing the arrow that originated by the *Agents of Media Profile* reaches the *Designers* (Figure 5.14).

This arrow includes the reflections of Mariette Dölle on how the value of *Designers'* works increases once they inhabit important museums like MoMA. Also the *Designers'* fees paid by museums to host their works are included here. This subject emerges in the interview with Mischer'Traxler who notice how artists are used to ask for fees and that this is a strategy that the studio is starting to adopt as well. Similarly FormaFantasma have learned to ask for money to those who want to exhibit their works. But mediated contexts like design festivals can also be the place where sales take place, thus determining an earning for *Commissioners* and *Designers*. Such economic trade occurs in Minale-Maeda's case when copies of their Dusk / Dawn Mirror were sold at the Salone del Mobile in Milan. Exhibitions therefore are places where a monetary capital for *Designers* can materialize, either directly or indirectly, though *Designers* do not always take advantage of that. A direct earning can take place by asking for a fee when exhibiting or by using exhibitions as points of sale. An indirect benefit can be achieved by exhibiting at prestigious events and so increasing the potential value of the artefacts.

The findings concerning the trade of *Financial Value* are:

- Commissions do not represent earning, but an opportunity to develop a project to exploit later.
- Design events can be points of sales, determining an earning for *Commissioners* and consequently for the *Designers*.
- The venue of exhibitions can impact the value of the artefacts.
- *Designers* can ask for exhibitions fees, though they mostly do not.

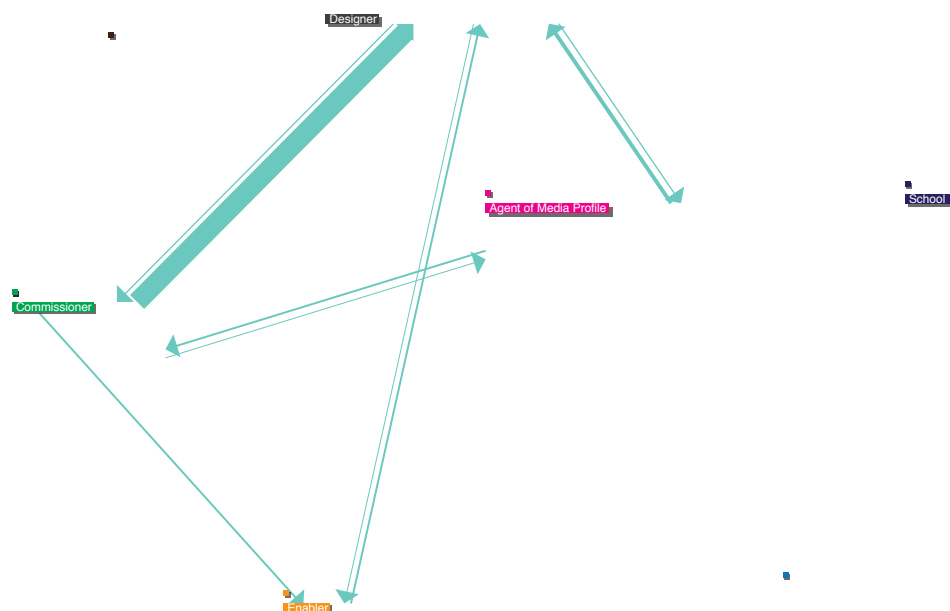


Figure 5.14. The Trade Map showing the exchange of Financial Value among actors

### 5.2.2.3 VISIBILITY

In the *Trade Map*, *Visibility* appears as mainly distributed by the *Agents of Media Profile*, while a collateral exchange takes place between *Designers* and *Commissioners* (Figure 5.15). In reality, the exchange of *Visibility* between *Designers* and *Commissioners* is strongly related to the distribution of *Visibility* operated by the *Agents of Media Profile*. In fact, the *Agents of Media Profile* represent the context where *Visibility* is raised and amplified. That is why, in every case, the trade of *Visibility* between *Commissioners* and *Designers*, saw also the involvement of the *Agents of Media Profile*.

As the commissions are completed, the *Designers* benefit in terms of *Visibility* because the *Commissioners* often organizes openings and publications to make the commission public. Here, there are some examples found in the case studies of how *Commissioners* offer *Visibility* to the *Designers*.

Chris Kabel considers the commission as a “stage or a pedestal” (CK0:08:02) that he uses to launch a product, though he does not have a commercial plan for it. For him the commission by Witte de With and Tent represents an opportunity to show the Wood Ring Bench he designed to his network and so feeding his own media profile. Misher Traxler enjoys being featured on the catalogue that Carwan Gallery prepared with media-partner BrownBook. Furthermore Carwan Gallery also organizes the participation to numerous events, amongst which stands out the Salone del Mobile of Milan. The case study that led Lanzavecchia + Wai to design the Streamline Carpet and the Torque Vases spins mostly around the *Visibility* offered by Case da Abitare. In fact, Case da Abitare paired with Mercedes-Benz to organize a series of exhibitions in Italy and abroad called Meet Design where the project of Lanzavecchia + Wai is shown. Also in this case the Salone del Mobile of Milan is the climax for Meet Design in terms of *Visibility*. The opportunity to play a prominent role in the events organized by Case da Abitare represents, according to both commissioner and designer, a significant aspect for the involvement of Mercedes-Benz as a partner in the commission and Lanzavecchia + Wai as commissioned designers. Although the commission was concealed under an apparent commercial purpose to produce a home collection for Mercedes-Benz, the offering in terms of *Visibility* is mentioned numerous times by Francesca Taroni and Francesca Lanzavecchia. As a magazine, Case da Abitare obviously also offers *Visibility* on its pages. In the case study of FormaFantasma, the Salone del Mobile of Milan appears one more time. The participation in such an event has always been a prerogative of FormaFantasma and Fondazione Plart for the commission to take place. Even when gallery director Lia Rumma, stepped back from this collaboration, designers and commissioner urged to find a valid alternative. Through the case studies it has been learned that *Commissioners* are generally concerned with *Visibility*, that is why they are urged with organizing openings and publications. After all, it is in their own interest to spread the project through premiers and openings.

So, while *Commissioners* seem to offer *Visibility* at an initial stage, as the commission is



completed *Designers* extend the cycle of *Visibility*. This happens mainly through the credits that the *Designers* reserve to their *Commissioners* each time the design works are exhibited or published, or during interviews. Such agreements are in the cases where they appeared, always informal and loose. Mariette Dölle asked Chris Kabel to mention the name of Witte de With and Tent when possible. So, when the Wood Ring Bench is exhibited at the Dutch Design Week, it carries with it the name of its commissioner. Fondazione Plart operated in a similar manner with FormaFantasma who make their Botanica collection tour “like a pop star” (AT0:15:40), sending the artefacts to exhibitions after the premier at Rossana Orlandi’s space. Marco Petroni of Fondazione Plart is particularly grateful to FormaFantasma for the *Visibility* they provided to Fondazione Plart. The association of Fondazione Plart with FormaFantasma in the project Botanica made possible for Fondazione Plart to enter every context in which the project has been presented. Thus meaning that FormaFantasma’s exhibitions, lectures and interviews have spread the name of the commissioner together with the one of the designers. The *Designers*’ ability to make use of their contact lists to inform representatives of the media can lead to unpredictable results. This is the case of Minale-Maeda who sent a newsletter about the Dusk / Dawn Mirror to the editor of Wallpaper magazine. After that, the Dusk / Dawn Mirror has been awarded as best designed mirror of 2011, all for the joy of commissioner and designer. Also Marco Petroni of Fondazione Plart observes that the way the network grows and the reactions of the media can only be partially predicted, as for the rest a lot is left to luck and improvisation. However the role of the *Designers* in triggering such chain reactions is evident. In this sense, it appears that *Designers* often provide a sort of PR service for their *Commissioners* and their own practice through interviews and loans to exhibitions. The contacts with media representatives for articles and interviews as well as the contacts with event organizers and curators are mostly within the *Designers*’ network.

Crediting the *Commissioner*, whether in exhibitions, interviews or articles, appears as an important and delicate aspect of the design profession. Mischer’Traxler speak about the complexity of coming up with the right formula to include the name of their *Commissioners* when communicating about their projects. *Commissioners* tend to prefer introductions that imply a deeper involvement in the projects. For example, “in collaboration with” is a desirable way for Commissioners to associate their names to the ones of the *Designers*. As Mischer’Traxler explained, *Designers* have to be careful not to dilute their authorship with such formulas. That is why, according to Mischer’Traxler, “commissioned by” is the best way to credit the *Commissioner*. In fact, “commissioned by” is a clear way to say that the *Commissioner* is not involved in the design process, but is only the one that created the conditions for the commission to take place. Getting the credit on the media right is part of a negotiation process that *Designers* engage with the *Commissioners* and *Agents of Media Profile*. *Designers* have to manage their relationships with journalists, editors, curators and event organizers so to be able to spread their projects in the best way. Managing such relationships with the *Agents of Media Profile* can be a demanding job. Hella Jongerius relates lengthily about how editors and journalists are voracious for materials and interviews, but for *Designers* to host a visiting troop of journalists and cameramen, or even preparing and



sending images costs effort and time. Similarly, FormaFantasma describe their effort in managing logistics and production to take part in exhibitions. If *Designers* want to run their practice sustainably, they have to learn how to manage their relationships with the media, including exhibitions.

Hella Jongerius explicitly states that *Designers* are the ones eliciting media attention to the commissions, and that is something *Commissioners* are aware of. Hella Jongerius entertains a constant relationship with the media who perceive her as a cultural professional more than a commercial one. This aspect facilitates her task of circulating her projects in the media, allowing *Commissioners* with a strong commercial identity to access media that otherwise would be precluded to them. Such projects without the involvement of known *Designers* would not be able to blend with the content of design and non-design magazines. In the case of her collaboration with Phaidon Press, Hella Jongerius also provided the opportunity to exhibit the 300 Coloured Vases during her solo exhibition at the Boijmans Museum in Rotterdam, which contributed to raise the cultural perception by the media of the project, thus leading to an easier and greater distribution of the project on the media. If one wants to say it in Hella Jongerius' terms, *Designers* possess that “*cultural allure*” (HJ0:15:31) that the media love. FormaFantasma's case confirms this statement, with Marco Petroni that as a commissioner is solely interested in the cultural meanings of the project and the network the project generates within the media. It is the cultural depth of Botanica that awakes the attention of curator Paola Antonelli and critic Alice Rawsthorn allowing the project and the credited name of Fondazione Plart to resonate in media and exhibitions.

So the trade between *Designer* and *Commissioner* in terms of *Visibility* is the one of an exchange, done in complicity with the *Agents of Media Profile*. The *Commissioners* generally organize and provide the public premier of the project, while the *Designers* spread it further through their vast network of journalists, editors, critics, and curators. Of course there are exceptions to this *modus operandi*. Among the case studies, Carwan Gallery and Droog took care of all the exhibitions and so did Case da Abitare. These commissioners keep control of the circulation of the artefacts through exhibitions. The reason behind this is rather simple; Droog, Carwan Gallery, Case da Abitare, and also Phaidon Press to some extent, are players of the design industry and, just like the *Designers*, they possess the network and know-how to organize or participate in exhibitions. So in those case studies, the *Commissioners' Visibility* adds to the one of the *Designers*, fueling the trade observed in the research. Designers Mischer+Traxler and Lanzavecchia + Wai have shown appreciation for the *Visibility* granted by the events organized by their commissioners, thus proving that *Visibility* is a desirable commodity in this context of design. Conversely Fondazione Plart, Witte de With and Tent either come from other contexts or are not as familiar with the network of exhibitions and events, and have to almost entirely rely on the commissioned designers to provide such *Visibility*, beyond the marginal premieres they organized.

The *Agents of Media Profile* serve as amplifiers that need to be triggered in order to gain

*Visibility*. Among the *Agents of Media Profile*, are included journalists, magazines, events and organizers. As seen before it is usually the *Designer* who proactively brings the projects into the mediated realms, thus eliciting the spread of *Visibility* operated by the *Agents of Media Profile*. Although the *Trade Map* cannot show such role of the *Designers*, they are partially responsible for activating the great spread of *Visibility* operated by the *Agents of Media Profile* (Figure 5.15). This is the case of Hella Jongerius providing the contact to Boijmans Museum; or FormaFantasma facilitating the involvement of Spazio Rossana Orlandi; or Chris Kabel activating Galerie Kreo and the Dutch Design Week organizers and Minale-Maeda sparking the reaction of Wallpaper magazine. Basically all the *Designers* helped the activation of the *Agents of Media Profiles* dissemination of the project. The only exceptions were represented by Lanzavecchia + Wai's and Mischer'Traxler's cases. In the first case, the commissioner Case da Abitare completely controlled the distribution of the project across the events they organized and the magazines of RCS group, whom they belong to. In the second case, commissioner Carwan Gallery organized the participation to a series of events in the Middle-East. The *Designers'* effort in triggering the *Agents of Media Profile* obviously is also in the *Designers'* own interest, as it would help raising their media presence. In fact, as shown by the *Trade Map*, both *Designers* and *Commissioners* then benefit by the *Agents of Media Profile's* spread of *Visibility* (Figure 5.15). Hella Jongerius says it clearly: "*If the project is ending, there is an end result. But the last result is the press*" (HJ0:14:12), and the findings on the analysis of the process have confirmed that it is part of the design practice to spread the design works across mediated contexts (see Section 5.2.1). It is when a project goes on magazines or in events that the name of the *Commissioners* and *Designers* are cemented in the project. In the design industry the media are particularly responsive and voracious, especially during design festivals. Katharina Mischer observes that "*many projects only happen because of media coverage*" (MT1:04:04), and the desire of some *Commissioners* to be featured on the media is the main reason why Mischer'Traxler receive commissions during the Salone del Mobile of Milan. Mario Minale makes a similar observation, noticing how in proximity of design events is easier to receive commissions or proactively approach *Commissioners*.

Mario Minale, Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte and Mischer'Traxler introduce the concept of quality in relation to *Visibility*, which is opposed to the one of quantity. They observe how articles on magazines do not translate into better sales. Minale-Maeda particularly appreciate the fact that galleries and companies opportunely select their guests when they organize openings. In this way there is a match between the projects and the visitors. The audience of those reading the magazines or browsing the design websites does not match with the possible customers, therefore such *Visibility* does not lead to direct earnings. Emilia Terragni of Phaidon Press observes the opposite phenomenon. She notices how the design community is constantly informed about whatever happens in the industry. What brings better sales of the books published by Phaidon Press is the presence on popular weeklies and newspapers like the New York Times, the Independent or The Guardian that allow them to reach possible readers outside of the design community. This is so because Phaidon Press' books are affordable and easily accessible by anyone, contrarily to the exclusive design items that Carwan Gallery

trades and Minale-Maeda designs.

There is one arrow concerning the *Financial Value* going from the *Designers* to the *Agents of Media Profile* (Figure 5.14). This trade that involves *Financial Value*, in reality tells also something important about *Visibility*, in fact the arrow indicates the incurred expenses for the *Designers* who invest in taking part in design fairs. Mario Minale talks explicitly about how pricey it can be for a *Designer* to work on prominent pieces aiming for *Visibility* and the participation in design festivals. This is so because *Designers* find themselves covering the expenses for participating in the events as well as not compromising the design and production of those pieces for cheaper solutions. Hella Jongerius confirms the fact that having to deal with the media, receiving journalists and photographers to the studio is demanding in terms of working hours, which correspond to *Financial Value*. In short, *Visibility* can be costly in terms of money, time and effort. However, the care for their media profile is a necessary attention the *Designers* ought to have, as opportunities are often determined by it. Chris Kabel explicitly states the importance of a media-profile for his practice. He says:

*“I enjoy not so much being in the media, but the effect that it has being in the media. It opens up these kind of possibilities”* (CK0:43:18)

The opportunities he refers to include his involvement in education. Other interviewees confirmed the necessity of inhabiting mediated contexts in order to get commissions. For example, Mischer’Traxler met Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte at a design festival in Berlin; similarly, Hella Jongerius obtained this commission also as a consequence of her involvement in a previous publication of Phaidon Press. FormaFantasma invested in the project Autarky and its exhibition during the edition of the Salone del Mobile 2010 with the intention of catching the attention of media and visitors, hoping for opportunities to emerge. Also Francesca Lanzavecchia relates on a recent commission occurring after a Brazilian company saw a post of her projects on design website Dezeen.com.

*Visibility* also emerges in the relationship between *Designers* and *Enablers*. Noticeably, *Designers* are the one that more than anyone else manages such relationship. Furthermore, the commodity that is exchanged the most in the relationship between *Designers* and *Enablers* is *Visibility*, which appears a big incentive for everyone to take on the project.

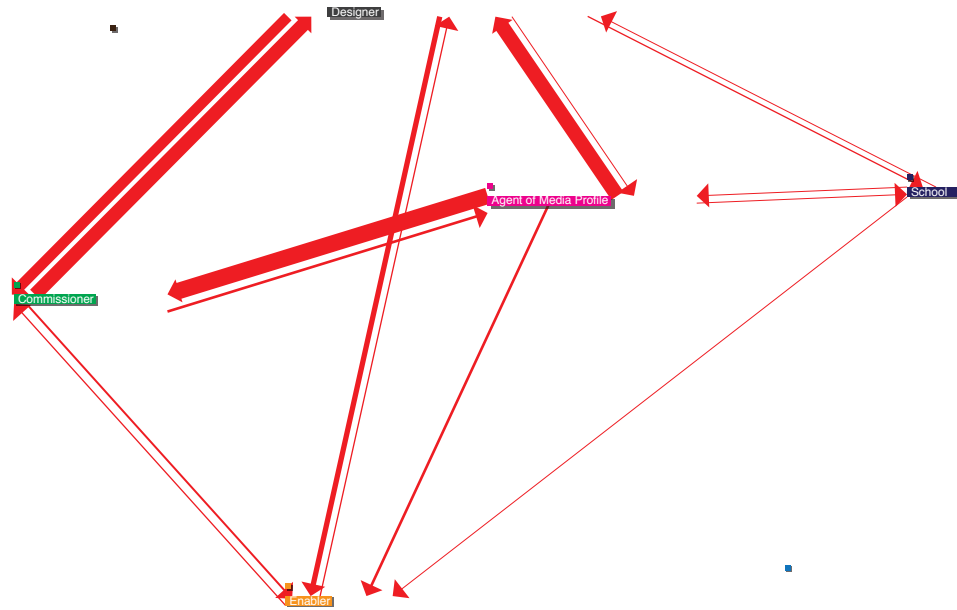


Figure 5.15. The Trade Map showing the exchange of Visibility among actors

What has been found about *Visibility* can be summarized as follows:

- *Designers* provide exposure in exhibitions to *Commissioners*. The participation in exhibitions through loans can serve as promotional campaigns for the *Commissioners*.
- *Commissioners* who have a media profile within the design industry provide further *Visibility* resulting in more appealing commissions to the *Designers*.
- Crediting is a complex but necessary part of the design practice in order to keep a good relationship with *Clients* and *Commissioners*.
- *Designers* and their network of cultural institutions help raise the profile of the project and therefore facilitate its circulation on the media.
- The media profile of *Designers* can determine the opportunities that will be presented to them, but designing with the sole goal of gathering *Visibility* as well as having to deal with media representatives can be costly in terms of time, efforts and expenses.

#### 5.2.2.4 REPUTATION

*Reputation* is profusely traded among *Designers*, *Commissioners* and *Agents of Media Profile*. In this triangular exchange, the transfer of *Reputation* from the *Designers* to the *Commissioners* is the trade that is discussed the most in the interviews (Figure 5.16).

The numerous statements deriving from the interviews cover a broad spectrum of cases

in which the *Commissioners* benefit from the collaboration with *Designers* in terms of *Reputation*. Chris Kabel observes how the involvement of famous designers like Jasper Morrison or Kostantin Grcic raises the status of their commissioners, besides providing a commercial advantage in terms of sales. Marielle Janmaat of Droog expresses the same concept when she states that the name of famous designers raises the interest of possible customers. Often - as Chris Kabel reflects - the name of the *Designer* associated to ordinary objects makes those products somewhat special. Once, Chris Kabel directly experienced such a phenomenon, while commissioned by a Japanese lighting company that was solely interested in releasing a lamp bearing Chris Kabel's name on its shell. Hella Jongerius expands Chris Kabel's and Marielle Janmaat's thoughts. She agrees that *Designers* raise the status of their *Commissioners*, but she also specifies that such trade is based on a certain "*cultural allure*" (HJ0:15:31) the *Designers' Reputation* is associated to. From the case studies mentioned above, it could be learned that *Designers* bring a cultural connotation to the commissions and that the name of a *Designer* is a decisive factor in raising the status of a *Commissioner*. In order to understand the building of this *Reputation* in cultural terms it is necessary to look at the role of the *Agents of Media Profile* in the trade of *Reputation*.

*Agents of Media Profile* are crucial actors in raising *Reputation* as a capital for *Designers* to trade. Interviews, articles and exhibitions play a critical role in the way *Reputation* is circulated. The central role of the media in the exchange of *Reputation* is evident in the *Trade Map* (Figure 5.16), with thick brown arrows departing from the *Agents of Media Profile* and reaching *Designers* and *Commissioners*. From the case studies study it emerged how for Chris Kabel the acquisition of his Mesh Chair by MoMA represents a capital in terms of *Reputation*. The *Reputation* Chris Kabel has built for himself is a significant commodity he trades with his *Clients* and *Commissioners*, which are in fact "*chasing him more*" (CK0:55:01), after his chair entered MoMA. Mariette Dölle, Marco Petroni – respectively commissioners of Chris Kabel and FormaFantasma – and designers Minale-Maeda confirm that the involvement of cultural institutions in design projects raises the status of the *Designers* and the value of their work. Curators, critics and journalists provide credibility to the work of the *Designers*, as generally stated by Marco Petroni and Mariette Dölle who indicate curator Paola Antonelli and critic Alice Rawsthorn as actors capable of providing *Reputation* in the trade. Hella Jongerius hints at the cultural value that an institution like the Boijmans Museum of Rotterdam brings in the commission as the element blunting the commercial nature of the commissioner Phaidon Press. Similarly, even when the *Commissioners* have a stronger commercial connotation, like in the case of Mercedes-Benz for example, it is likely to find the involvement of cultural figures like critic Giulio Cappellini, who, as Francesca Taroni of Case da Abitare stated, contributes to the credibility of the project. The involvement of such cultural figures raises the cultural profile of the project, and contributes to the circulation on the media. The *Designers* operating in this context of design, by inhabiting cultural environments like museums and receiving reviews from authoritative critics, bring with themselves an association with cultural values. This cultural allure is also what facilitates the circulation of the projects onto the media, as it has been observed earlier in relation to *Visibility* (see Section 5.2.2.3)

More related to the commission, and less on the general functioning of the industry, Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte relates about the benefit in terms of *Reputation* that Carwan Gallery received from Mischer'Traxler's Gradient Marsharabiya Sideboard. According to Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte, this project provided a clearer identity to Carwan Gallery. This resulted in "*a certain fame, and heavier establishment*" (NB-L0:42:19) that allows Carwan Gallery to be more respected within the industry. The commission from Fondazione Plart to FormaFantasma produced nearly identical results. The benefits gained by Fondazione Plart in terms of *Reputation* are in this case even more evident in Marco Petroni's interview that relates four times about such trade. FormaFantasma with their project Botanica have confirmed the role of Fondazione Plart as the one of an institution that can make possible important projects for the design community. FormaFantasma, by circulating the project through their activities have validated the name of Fondazione Plart. Such activities involve exhibiting and giving lectures and interviews. It can be concluded that, in terms of project content, *Designers* help define the identity of a *Commissioner*. But once the project has been completed it is the circulation of a project in events and media that validates the role of a *Commissioner*.

For the *Commissioners*, the participation in design events represents validation. Design festivals are the contexts in which their names are associated with success and approval. Mariette Dölle considers the exhibition of Chris Kabel's Wood Ring Bench at the Dutch Design Week as the proof that Witte de Witte is "*able to commission a work that became quite a crucial work for Chris Kabel*" (MD0:20:09). Similarly, Emilia Terragni considers the presentation of the 300 Coloured Vases by Hella Jongerius at Design Miami/Basel as where "*Phaidon confirmed its radical role*" allowing Hella Jongerius to "*do something that she could not have done by herself*" (ET0:31:12). In the case of Minale-Maeda's Dusk / Dawn Mirror, it is the Wallpaper award that affirms Droog as a brand in the design industry. In the case study of Botanica, Fondazione Plart benefitted in terms of *Reputation* from the approval of influential critic Alice Rawsthorn and curator Paola Antonelli as well as design magazine Domus and famous institutions MoMA and the Art Institute of Chicago. Fundamentally, in this context of design, *Reputation* is not provided by commercial success, but by the circulation of the projects in design events and publications.

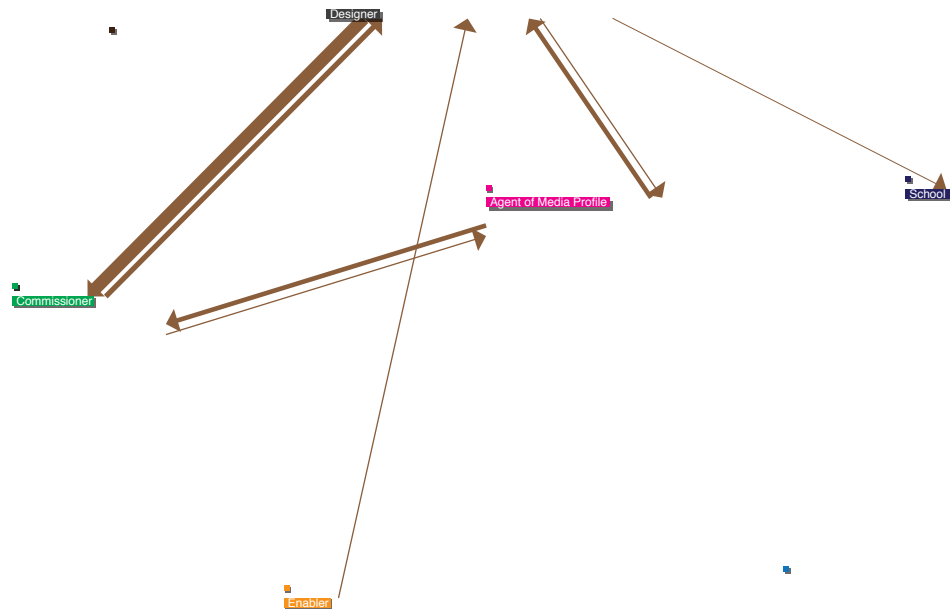


Figure 5.16. The Trade Map showing the exchange of Reputation among actors

The findings about *Reputation* are:

- Designers' works help define the identity of a *Commissioner*.
- The circulation of a project in events and media validates the role of a *Commissioner*.
- *Designers* possess a cultural connotation that helps the raising of the *Commissioners'* profile.
- The involvement of cultural institutions raises the cultural profile of the project, and contributes to the circulation on the media.
- The circulation of the project on the media, in turn, raises the profile of *Designers* and *Commissioners*. So, it can be observed that, *Reputation* is not provided by commercial success, but by the circulation of the projects in design events and publications.

### 5.2.2.5 PERSONAL REWARD

From the *Trade Map* that congregates the transactions occurring in the commissions and industry, it is clear that *Designers* are the ones that receive a higher *Personal Reward* from their involvement in the design industry. Two yellow arrows indicating *Personal Reward* reach the *Designers*, one coming from the *Agents of Media Profile* and one from the *Commissioners* (Figure 5.17).

*Designers* feel personally rewarded every time their work reaches an audience. In most cases this happens through mediated contexts. Whether it is the *Image* being spread in a newspaper,



or visitors looking at the *Display* during design events, *Designers* appreciate the idea of entering the people's experience; especially those people outside of the design community.

Chris Kabel and Francesca Lanzavecchia feel rewarded when the *Image* of their works circulate on popular media beyond design. For Chris Kabel it is also gratifying when his bench is included in dance performances that have little to do with design. Mario Minale likes listening to the comments of passers-by when presenting at popular public events like the Salone del Mobile of Milan. Understandably, *Designers' Personal Reward* also derives from professional accomplishments, like having an article dedicated to the studio in a popular magazine. This is the case of Mischer'Traxler who recall with pleasure the article that Abitare published about them. Similarly, the Wallpaper award for the Dusk / Dawn Mirror was rewarding for Minale-Maeda. The same satisfaction can be noticed in Chris Kabel's case when MoMA acquired his Mesh Chair and in Francesca Lanzavecchia's case when critic Giulio Cappellini reviewed her work.

The *Personal Reward* reaching the *Designers* from the *Commissioners* derives instead from sales. The *Personal Reward* is not necessarily related to the earning, but rather to the opportunity of seeing the work being appreciated and understood by people. Mariette Dölle reflects on the way Chris Kabel through his objects establishes a relationship with collectors. Because his sales volumes are so low, he almost gets to know each person who purchases his works and this is fulfilling an important part of his professional agenda. Similarly, for Mischer'Traxler it was gratifying to meet a Middle-eastern noble who then bought their Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard. Design pieces are a way to connect on a personal level with people that otherwise could not be reached.

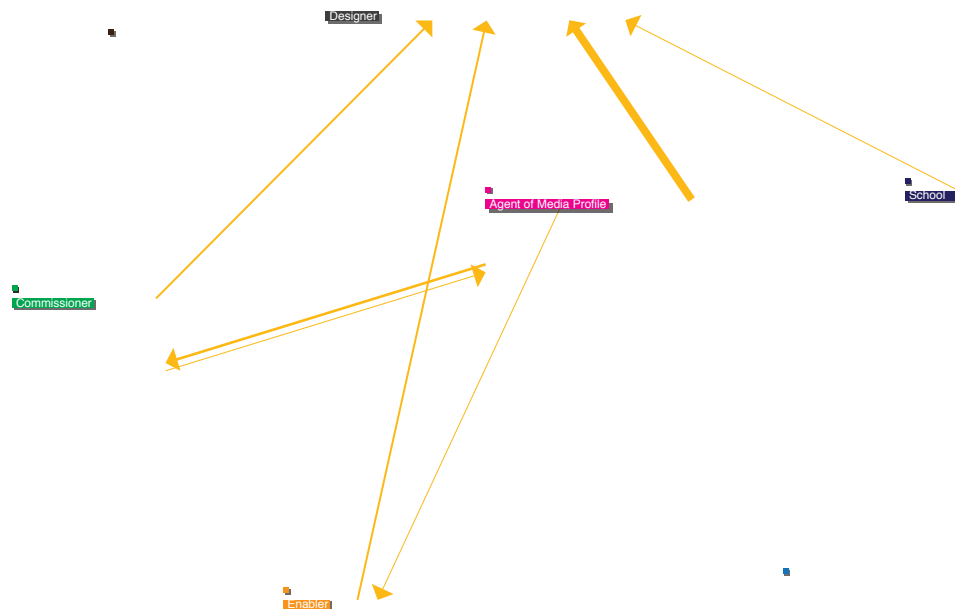


Figure 5.17. The Trade Map showing the exchange of Personal Reward among actors



To summarize, the findings about *Personal Reward* are:

- *Designers* appreciate the possibility of reaching those outside of the design community through media and exhibitions.
- The acquisition of works by museums and the attention of the media is rewarding for the *Designers*.

## 5.3 SUMMARY

This chapter has illustrated the main findings deriving from the research study. In order to do so, all the *Process Charts* have been agglomerated into one (Figure 5.01). The same has been done with the *Trade Maps*, thus originating one simplified map including data from *Designers* and *Commissioners* reflecting on the commission and the general trade in the design industry (Figure 5.12). The resulting *Process Chart* and *Trade Map* merged all the case studies and served as guidance through the wealth of information collected. It has then been possible to reflect on the totality of the information and identify relevant findings.

For what concerns the process, it has been interesting to notice how case studies outline a descending trend in the *Process Chart*. Thus meaning that the attention, while the process unfolds from the *Commission* to the *Consumption*, progressively shifts from the *Piece* to its *Image*. Commissions since their beginning foresee the proposal of an artefact, which is then designed representing both the identities of the *Designers* and their *Commissioners*. *Designers* generally take care of its *Production*. Once the *Piece* is produced, attention moves on to the *Display*. The *Display* of the artefacts, intended as the exhibition of those, are crucial in the process. Often, the premiere of the *Display* is already in the plans when the commission is proposed, thus also defining a deadline for its completion. The venue can have an impact on few design decisions, for instance for an exclusive venue, *Designers* can opt for better finishing and materials. The design works circulate as *Displays* in exhibitions and it is so that they are consumed by the most diverse visitors, ranging from the fancy collectors to the ordinary passers-by. The *Image* of the artefact is another relevant outcome of the commissions. It is noticeable the abundance of information related to the *Design* and *Production* of the *Image* and then to its *Distribution* and *Consumption*. *Design* and *Production* of the *Image* are tasks often undertaken by the *Designers*. This is so because *Designers* are particularly urged with depicting their creations in a way that conveys their meanings and messages, beyond merely portraying them. *Designers*, through their extended network can grant *Commissioners* access to the media, thus appearing as gateways to on-line and printed magazines. It is thanks to these mediated contexts that the exclusive designed objects reach also the ordinary people as an *Image*.

As for what concerns the trade, this chapter has observed the five commodities (*Autonomy*, *Financial Value*, *Visibility*, *Reputation* and *Personal Reward*) separately.

Generally all case studies denote a remarkable degree of *Autonomy* being granted to *Designers*. *Designers* are mostly left free to propose the outcome they prefer. Sometimes the *Commissioners* guide the *Designers* through lists of suggested outcomes, though these are often flexible. In commercial terms, when the *Commissioners* are not involved with the sale of the artefacts, *Designers* are free to propose and exploit the project independently, without any agreement bonding them to their *Commissioner*. Lastly, in most cases, *Designers*

independently choose the *Enablers* to involve. So they provide a network of producers and collaborators to achieve the desired result.

For what concerns *Financial Value*, it had been possible to note two different cases. In the first case, *Designers* are given a lump-sum amount of money. This money has to cover all the expenses related to the project, ranging from its design and production to transportation and documentation costs, like photo-shootings for example. *Designers* have to make that money suffice. So this money does not determine a direct earning, but rather an opportunity to develop a project in the best way to then propose it elsewhere and earn from future sales, thanks to the *Autonomy* granted by *Commissioners*. Some other times, *Commissioners* take care of the production and *Designers* only rely on fees deriving from the eventual sales. Sales occasionally take place directly at design fairs, which then represent opportunities for earning. The participation to exhibitions can also determine a cost, as it demands work for shipping, insurance, and reproduction of missing or broken pieces. However, few *Designers* have learned how to ask for a fee when taking part to exhibitions, so at least not to lose money in seek for *Visibility*.

*Visibility* is a topic interviewees relate profusely about. *Commissioners* grant considerable *Visibility* to the project – and therefore to the *Designers* and to themselves – through openings and communication material. After this initial stage, it is the *Designers* that provide *Visibility* to the *Commissioners* by disseminating the project through their network of media representatives and curators. This PR activity usually results in interviews, articles and loans. It is the *Designers'* care to credit the *Commissioners* correctly when presenting in these contexts. Crediting as well as managing the relationship with the media and event organizers can be a demanding job for a *Designer*; that is why *Designers* need to be careful in investing effort and time in these activities. The *Designers'* association with the world of culture more than with the one of commerce is also beneficial in the circulation of the projects on the media. For *Commissioners* this represents a significant advantage in terms of *Visibility* as the doors of magazines suddenly open for them. As the *Designers* keep contact with the network of *Agents of Media Profile*, they are also partially responsible for the wealth of *Visibility* generated by the *Agents of Media Profile*.

The main trade of *Reputation* occurs from *Designers* to *Commissioners*. *Designers* possess a cultural connotation that renders them desirable by *Commissioners*. This cultural connotation derives from the familiarity of selected *Designers* with critics and curators, magazines and museums. The benefits in terms of *Reputation* are often related to the ones of *Visibility*. In particular the cultural connotation of *Designers* facilitating the circulation of the project on the media also raises the status of the *Commissioner*. *Designers* are also helpful in interpreting the identity of the *Commissioners* through their work. The *Agents of Media Profile* provide approval and validation to the projects, to the *Designers* and to the *Commissioners*. Therefore it is such circulation that defines how successful the project has been.

The circulation of the project also determines a *Personal Reward* for the *Designers*. Whether it is about someone purchasing and then using their creations, or some interested visitor or reader, the *Designers* are happy to see their works reaching an audience. Beside that, professional achievements like seeing their work acquired by important cultural institutions the likes of MoMA or having it reviewed by authoritative figures like critic Giulio Cappellini, also produces a sense of *Personal Reward* to the *Designers*.

The next chapter will reason further on the findings highlighted. The aim of the next chapter is to better describe the dynamics ruling the design industry and the models adopted by designers for their practice, finally answering the research question that has triggered this thesis:

**What commodities (intended as the ensemble of goods, values, competencies and services) are traded in the contemporary design industry and by whom?**



# **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK**



## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

As the ubiquitous presence of the media has had an impact on our society and culture, the way the design industry has developed has also changed. Now the abundance of design events and on-line or printed publications has led to a complex trade in the industry that does not rely on the mere design – production – distribution sequence aiming at the sale of artefacts. Designers are now approached by a variety of commissioners attracted by the meanings and the circulation of the design works in the media and exhibitions, rather than by the possibility of producing and distributing products on a larger scale. The broad purpose of this research is to understand what is being traded in the contemporary design industry. The main goal of this chapter is to provide an answer to the research question and aims that have guided this thesis.

Chapter One framed the context of the research and explained the need for a better understanding of the trade occurring in the contemporary industry. In this way, research aims and objectives were presented. Chapter Two provided a brief excursus in the history of design. This served as a background to describe the current state of the relationship between design and media and its impact on the current industry. Furthermore, a review of theories from Cultural Studies and Philosophy helped understand the way culture is circulated, the role of the media and how this has impacted on the position of the designer in our society. Finally a review of selected design works portrayed the way designers relate to mediated contexts. Chapter Three described the preliminary studies informing the main study and the way the main study was planned and conducted. In the same chapter, it was also explained how the resulting data were filtered, displayed and analyzed and how the use of visualizations helped the analytical process. Chapter Four exposed the six selected case studies, displaying the data and interpretations for each of them. Chapter Five further elaborated the wealth of data from the individual cases. Here the information converged in a reasoning that included all the cases so as to come to relevant findings. This chapter builds a discourse based on the results and findings of this study in order to answer the research question, which is worth proposing again now:

**What commodities (intended as the ensemble of goods, values, competencies and services) are traded in the contemporary design industry and by whom?**



## 6.2 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH AIMS

In order to find answers to the main research questions, this research looks into the following research aims:

- A. To identify the relevant actors and their roles in the contemporary design industry.**
- B. To understand how the designer's and commissioner's media profile have an impact on their role in the design industry.**
- C. To understand what else a designer can trade, apart from the design of the artefacts and whether this requires a new model for a design process.**

In the following parts of this section, each research aim is fulfilled by making use of the information deriving from the main study; when appropriate, the information deriving from the preliminary studies has also been included. The results and findings that in many ways provide answers to these questions are here further assessed and summarized in the following sub-sections.

### 6.2.1 RESEARCH AIM A: THE RELEVANT ACTORS AND THEIR ROLES IN THE DESIGN INDUSTRY

As far as this objective is concerned, through the study it has been possible to notice how the design industry mainly spins around three principal actors: the *Designers*, the *Commissioners* and the *Agents of Media Profile*. The *Enablers*, who are also players in the design industry, occupy a more marginal role in its economy. The next sub-section describes each of these actors individually.

#### 6.2.1.1 THE DESIGNERS

The *Designers* represent a crucial knot in the network. Having great *Autonomy*, the *Designers* are most of the time in charge of designing and producing the artefacts and managing and proposing the team of *Enablers* that makes the project possible. This means

that the *Designers* often provide contact with manufacturers and producers. Besides this, *Designers* are also able to manage the network of those who can be helpful in relation to the representation of the *Piece*; these can be photographers or writers for instance, or even the *Designers* themselves. *Designers* invest great effort in making sure that the representations of their pieces, whether as *Displays* or *Images*, convey the concepts and messages contained in their works in the most effective way. Remarkably, *Designers* have proved to possess the network of media representatives that help the circulation of the projects in media and exhibitions. All the case studies have depicted *Designers* involved in every phase of the project from its *Design* to its *Distribution* in mediated contexts. *Designers* operating in the context of design with high *Media Attention* and low *Physical Accessibility* can be described as one-man-bands that can take care of the *Design* and *Production* of the *Pieces*, produce the *Image* to be circulated, find venues for the *Display* and manage their participation in exhibitions, favour the circulation of their work through the media and entertain relationships with the media.

#### 6.2.1.2 THE COMMISSIONERS

Seeking for the trade occurring in the contemporary design industry characterized by high *Media Attention* and low *Physical Accessibility*, this research focused on projects that had a commissioning party, so *Commissioners* appear as the initiators of the projects. *Commissioners* approach *Designers* fundamentally for one reason: they need physical artefacts. There can be two strategies leading to this necessity: the first is related to sales, meaning that the *Commissioners* can be involved and profit from the sales of the designed artefacts; the second may be dictated by the necessity of the *Commissioners* to have an artefact that would represent them and their context of action. This is mainly the case for cultural institutions, but also commercial brands for which the sale of the designed *Pieces* is not relevant to their activities, such as Mercedes-Benz in this study. However, the artefacts to be sold also explore and represent the area of competence of the *Commissioners*. The case of Carwan Gallery commissioning Mischer'Traxler has well exemplified the double role of the artefact as an item for sale and a representation of Carwan Gallery's identity. Carwan Gallery approached Mischer'Traxler inviting them to design an item to add to their collection. However, by imposing a traditional Middle-eastern craft, the artefact automatically embodies both the Western design identity of its designers and the Middle-eastern culture of the craftsman; the fusion of these two elements constitutes the foundation of Carwan Gallery's identity and the resulting Gradient Mashrabiya Sideboard represents it well. *Commissioners* usually provide a broad conceptual context for the *Designers* to explore and the basic economic means to make the project happen. Furthermore, the research has observed how often *Commissioners* also organize the premiere presentations of the outcome or, at any rate, are concerned about the fact that the projects be made public.

### 6.2.1.3 THE AGENTS OF MEDIA PROFILE

The *Agents of Media Profile* are crucial actors in the design network. They provide validation and resonance, *Reputation* and *Visibility*. When the projects access design events or magazines, the role of *Designers* and *Commissioners* is validated. In fact, the presence of the projects in these mediated contexts represents a seal of warranty stating that all the actors who participated in the project are able to do their job well. By accessing design events, *Commissioners* are shown to be able to make projects happen and to allow *Designers* to develop work that otherwise they could not do. The *Designers* see in these contexts the approval of the value of their work. Sometimes, when the *Agent of Media Profile* is particularly renowned (i.e., MoMA), the *Financial Value* of the pieces and the desirability of the *Designers* in the design market can increase. But design events do not only confirm the competence of *Commissioners* and *Designers*, they also dictate a calendar of deadlines by which projects have to be completed. The context of the events also has an impact on the design process and final result. For example, an exclusive event can suggest the use of more precious materials, while a popular event like the Salone del Mobile might push *Commissioners* and *Designers* towards more communicative directions. This is so because different audiences populate different design events and it is convenient that the designed pieces be adapted to the kind of audience attending them. In exclusive events attended by possible collectors, it is appropriate to propose expensive and refined items, while in popular events thought-provoking projects might be more effective for engaging the attention of the audience. Besides buyers, also chance visitors will attend the events, so that design events are contexts where ordinary people can be reached. Similarly, magazines are tools for the *Designers* to access the life of people although in a two-dimensional form.

### 6.2.1.4 THE ENABLERS

*Enablers* are marginal actors in relation to the trade, but they are crucial in the process for projects to be completed. This category features a variety of professionals including craftsmen and manufacturers, as well as photographers and other specialists offering their expertise and services. In addition, governments that support the projects with sponsorships also belong to this category. The *Enablers'* involvement can be found in the different stages of the process. Manufacturers and craftsmen are obviously to be found in the *Production* of the *Piece*. Other professionals like photographers and writers are involved in the *Production* of the *Image*. This is so for photographers Luisa Zanzani and Davide Farabegoli, in charge of documenting respectively FormaFantasma's and Lanzavecchia + Wai's works, or critic Louise Schouwenberg and graphic designer Irma Boom who worked on Phaidon Press' book *Misfit*, articulating and visualizing Hella Jongerius' thought. Governments can support the *Designers* in various ways. In the case studies the support of the Austrian government emerged in covering some of the necessary expenses for Mischer-Traxler to exhibit in a design festival in Berlin, and Mariette Dölle hints at the support provided by Dutch government to

the Dutch design community. In most cases, the network of *Enablers* is facilitated by the personal relationships that *Designers* have built with these professionals.

#### 6.2.1.5 SUMMARY

To summarize, therefore, *Designers* can be described as those who: design the *Piece*; find the *Enablers* for the *Production of Pieces and Images*; possess the contacts with the *Agents of Media Profile* for circulating the *Image* and *Display* of the designed works.

The role of the *Commissioners* is to: provide a conceptual context for the project; provide the basic means for the project to take place; usually organize premieres and openings.

The *Agents of Media Profile* validate the role of *Designers* and *Commissioners*; add value to the projects; dictate deadlines; allow the design works to reach buyers, visitors and readers.

Finally, *Enablers* provide expertise and sometimes support the projects with sponsorships.

### 6.2.2 RESEARCH AIM B: THE MEDIA PROFILE AND ITS IMPACT

As this research focused on that part of design which, more than others, is impacted on by the media, the media profile results as an important aspect of the design industry. From this research, the *Designers'* and *Commissioners'* media profiles emerged as the ensemble of public relations skills, network and cultural meanings resulting from the presence of design in the mediated contexts. This study has highlighted the fact that the media profile has an impact on the opportunities that a *Designer* is given, as it represents a possibility for *Commissioners* and *Enablers* to benefit from the *Designer's Visibility and Reputation*. But the media profile is not a peculiarity limited to the *Designers*; *Commissioners* can also possess one and make use of it, in the form of exhibitions or publications directly organized by the *Commissioner*. In both cases, the media profile is indicative of what one can offer in the design industry and plays a role in the occurring trade.

#### 6.2.2.1 THE MEDIA PROFILE

Prior to this study, the media profile of the *Designers* was intended merely as the collection of their publications on the web and in the printed media and participation in events. The preliminary study monitoring the Google Alerts confirmed the strong correlation existing between the presence of *Designers* in design events and their popularity in the

media. The main study expanded the notion of the *Designers'* media profiles, revealing that these depend on their activities of public relations and connections with representatives of the media and event organizers. Therefore, the media profile of the *Designers* is a reflection of their media reach and the extension of their networks to media representatives. Naturally, the notion of a media profile does not only depend on the *Designers'* networks; their skills in conceiving and producing images to circulate in the media, preparing press-releases or designing and organizing exhibition set-ups are contributing factors as well. The importance given to such activities is made evident by the *Designers'* care when thinking of the photos to be distributed or when designing their exhibitions. These are only rarely mere displays of the pieces, but rather true installations (i.e., in the case of Hella Jongerius' Wheel of Colour and FormaFantasma's Botanica installation) and sometimes even performances as in the case of Mischer'Traxler's participation in Design Days Dubai. Similarly, the images of the designed artefacts are much more than just documenting material, but rather photographs that complement the pieces, so as to iconically depict them and communicate their concepts, as admitted by Chris Kabel, FormaFantasma and Francesca Lanzavecchia. When presenting their works in the media or events, *Designers* ensure that the messages and thought-provoking concepts encompassed in their designs are all well conveyed. The *Designers'* press releases are precisely designed and written so that journalists can copy the content to paste onto the pages of magazines and websites. Furthermore, the way *Designers* present themselves is also taken care of, with the involvement of trustworthy writers responsible for writing their profiles or explaining their work, as evident in Chris Kabel and Hella Jongerius' case.

For *Designers*, as their works are heavily circulated in the mediated contexts, projects can represent a way to consolidate and expand their media profile. The idea of the artefacts as itinerant emissaries of the *Designer* is explicit in Chris Kabel's words when he talks about one of his works. He says:

*"it was a little ambassador and as long as that kept a certain visibility,  
it would have also reaffirmed in time and time again, my status as a  
designer."* (CK0:25:34)

This quote strongly confirms what this research has observed, that is, the *Visibility* of a media-profile is a prerogative of the design profession.

*Commissioners* can also have a media profile within the design industry. This has been observed in four case studies throughout this research. Carwan Gallery, Droog, Case da Abitare and Phaidon Press are known players in this industry. Throughout their presence in the design industry, Carwan Gallery and Droog have built their media profile by commissioning design works, exhibiting them at international venues and being featured in the reports of the media. Magazine Case da Abitare and publisher Phaidon Press belong to the publishing industry focusing on design matters. These two represent an interesting typology of *Commissioners*

because they decided not to limit themselves to featuring the existing design works. Instead, they extended their role to that of commissioning new work to then feature in their event and editorial activities. Though the printed media represent their core business, they now also organize design events, as this study has observed. This represents a significant shift in the way we conceive of *Commissioners*, as it proves that representatives of the media industry can now play a proactive role in the design industry. Just like their *Designers*, these four *Commissioners* have the necessary skills and networks for circulating the design works that they commission through events and media. So the *Visibility* that *Commissioners* make available adds to that of the *Designers*, fueling the trade observed in the research.

#### 6.2.2.2 WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF A MEDIA PROFILE?

For *Designers* and their *Commissioners* to inhabit the mediated contexts is synonymous of value and validation of their work. Besides that, a well-constructed media profile leads to association with cultural institutions and authoritative magazines, contributing a cultural nuance to the design practice. In particular the media profile of the *Designers* proves that they are able to access the media more or less regularly and identifies them as cultural intermediaries. The cultural connotation of *Designers* derives from their involvement with institutions and contexts like museums and events, but also magazines and publications of all sorts. This study has observed that the cultural connotation of the *Designers* renders them appealing to the media. It is therefore a circular path that leads *Designers* who access the mediated contexts to gain a cultural connotation and, once their cultural status has been acknowledged, they are more likely to be featured in the mediated contexts. *Commissioners*, by commissioning these *Designers*, can associate themselves with the *Designers'* media profile and therefore enter this circular pattern.

Hella Jongerius has described this mechanism clearly; thanks to the “*cultural allure*” (HJ0:15:31) that she brings, her commercial *Commissioners* – who otherwise would have to pay for advertising space in the pages of magazines – can now circulate their names in media and events. In this sense, apart from the *Commissioners*, those who value the media profile are the *Agents of Media Profile*. They might ostracize projects in which the commercial media profile of the *Commissioners* is not well balanced by the involvement of a *Designer* with a cultural media profile. For the *Commissioners*, therefore, associating their names to those of the *Designers* contributes to raising their status.

#### 6.2.2.3 HOW IS THE MEDIA PROFILE USED?

Through the case studies, it has been possible to notice how often the first encounter between *Commissioners* and *Designers* takes place within the mediated contexts.

Design events emerged as the place where Mischer+Traxler and FormaFantasma met their future commissioners for the first time. Studio Lanzavecchia + Wai and Hella Jongerius were initially approached in the context of editorial projects for design publications. For *Designers*, inhabiting mediated contexts means nourishing their media profiles. The *Designers'* media profile is indispensable in establishing connections with potential *Commissioners* and raising their appeal in the design industry. Explicatory in this sense is the thought of Chris Kabel, when he thinks about the opportunities given to him because of his media profile. As Chris Kabel admitted, his media profile had been a significant factor in being offered to hold a workshop in Sicily, and in obtaining his teaching position at Swiss design school ECAL too. Similarly, Mario Minale sees a correlation between the media profile of design educators and their desirability to students and schools. In such cases, the media profile is used to secure involvement in design education. But the charm of the *Designers'* media profile obviously is not limited to the context of education. Marielle Janmaat of Droog observes that more people would buy the products of a famous designer. The experience of Chris Kabel with a Japanese light manufacturer that refused to release a lamp designed by him if the product did not bear his name, confirms the need for *Commissioners* to feature recognizable names on their products. To a certain extent, the study has provided evidence of the *Designers'* media profile being used as a factor for increasing sales, although this has never been a crucial point for this research, as the study focuses on projects resulting in very small volumes of sales. This research has observed that the commissions in this context of design are much more concerned with the audience of readers and visitors, curators and journalists, rather than users and customers.

According to Hella Jongerius, *Commissioners* turn to “a designer with a stature” (HJ0:04:00) in order to access the media through their involvement. The shadowing activity at FormaFantasma’s studio to some extent confirmed Hella Jongerius’ opinion, although FormaFantasma cannot be considered star-designers yet, but are surely gaining popularity in the media. During that preliminary study, an example of the attention that *Commissioners* have for the *Designers'* media profile emerged. On that occasion, a commissioner of FormaFantasma explicitly asked whether they could ensure that the project would be published on specific design websites. To this request, the FormaFantasma replied that there would not be any problem, as the editors of such websites were part of their network of contacts. Droog also benefited from Minale-Maeda’s network of media representatives when they circulated their newsletters to their contacts including the editor of Wallpaper magazine and so received the award for the best mirror of 2011. Therefore it can be said that *Commissioners* use the *Designers'* media profile to access their network of media representatives.

By commissioning *Designers*, institutions and brands are given the possibility of entering the *Designers'* media profiles and participating in their growth. Commissioners Phaidon Press, Witte de With and Tent and Fondazione Plart have all confirmed that by seeing the commissioned projects gaining *Visibility* in design events and media reports, they – as *Commissioners* and somehow patrons of the *Designers* – have associated themselves with the



future success of the *Designers*.

When *Commissioners* feature a media profile within the design industry, as in the cases of galleries Carwan and Droog, magazine Case da Abitare and – to some extent – publisher Phaidon Press, the commissions represent greater opportunities for *Designers* to gain *Visibility* and further raise their own media profile. In fact, these *Commissioners* are more likely to organize exhibitions and provide media coverage. However, even in these case studies, the *Designers* have contributed with their own media profiles, sometimes providing more connections with media representatives (i.e., the case of Minale-Maeda) and cultural institutions (i.e., the case of Hella Jongerius), and always providing their skills for the *Design* and *Production* of *Displays* and *Images*. Therefore, even these case studies have confirmed that the media profile of the *Designers* is useful, if not necessary, for the commissions to be successful.

#### 6.2.2.4 SUMMARY

In conclusion, this research has observed that the media profile in design represents more than just presence in the mediated contexts. The media profile represents skills in designing, producing and circulating material for communication purposes. This material consists of appealing *Pieces*, *Displays* and *Images*. Furthermore, the media profile is representative of the network of *Agents of Media Profile* that one is in contact with. In this sense, the media profile is indicative of the resonance and amplification that one can provide. In short, the media profile in design largely stands for *Visibility*. The media profile is not a prerogative of the *Designers*; *Commissioners* that belong to the design industry can also have one, thus adding to the competences and network of the *Designers*.

This thesis has proved that particularly for *Designers*, a media profile in design implies connections with museums and cultural institutions, as well authoritative magazines, thus resulting in a cultural connotation for the *Designers'* media profile. Such quality facilitates the circulation of the *Designers'* works in the media. The *Designers'* media profile entails popularity and prestige. It indicates at the same time the extent of the audience and the level of status; it is quantity and quality at the same time. To express this with the terminology used in this thesis, a well-constructed media profile infers *Reputation*, besides *Visibility*.

The study has proved that the *Designers'* media profile represents a capital of skills, network and cultural meanings, resulting in *Visibility* and *Reputation*. Such capital is used by the *Designers* to attract the attention of various actors in the design industry, ranging from schools to institutions and brands. *Commissioners* use the *Designers'* media profile as an opportunity to step onto the design stage and benefit from its *Visibility* and *Reputation*. When the *Commissioners* feature a media profile in design, the *Visibility* that they offer can represent an incentive for the *Designers* to take on the commission and consequently provide their skills



and networks, thus adding their *Visibility* and *Reputation* to those of the *Commissioners*.

### 6.2.3 RESEARCH AIM C: WHAT IS THE NEW DESIGN MODEL AND WHAT CAN A DESIGNER TRADE?

The purpose of this research aim is to better understand the offer in terms of services and values that a *Designer* can make available to the design industry. As the changes that media have brought to the design industry have led to an evolution of the design practice, this research aim describes what the model is for the *Designers* operating in the context of design that populates the mediated contexts.

#### 6.2.3.1 A NEW DESIGN MODEL

The design process highlighted in this research expands considerably as compared to the traditional one described by Ulrich and Eppinger (2004), which usually ceases once the product is ready. In some cases, such models have been extended to the distribution, consumption, dismissal and recycling of the products; even in those cases, however, the process has been kept limited to what concerns the physical products. Through the use of the *Process Charts*, this study has revealed the necessity of thinking of the design process also in terms of the *Display* of the artefact (i.e., its use in exhibitions) and its *Image* (i.e., photographs to be distributed). The *Design*, *Production* and *Distribution* of *Images* and *Displays* require organization of the workflow, a network of collaborators and skills. *Images*, in order to be successful, need to be “*iconic*” (MD0:34:58), as Mariette Dölle says, or they simply have to “*sell*” (CK0:15:00) the idea well, in the words of Chris Kabel. *Displays* have to be true installations – as in the cases of FormaFantasma and Hella Jongerius – or even performances – as in Mischer’Traxler’s case – to attract the attention of visitors and press. The research has also highlighted how demanding the spreading of the commissioned work across the media and exhibitions can be, requiring a considerable investment of time and effort by *Designers* and *Commissioners*. For the *Commissioners*, organizing the premieres and presentation can be challenging, as proved for example in Fondazione Plart’s case, where the venue was re-organized several times also with the help of the designers FormaFantasma. For the *Designers* these premieres represent true deadlines by which the projects have to be finished, causing last-minute rushes and stress. Furthermore, this study has observed the prolonged work of the *Designers* to keep their projects circulating beyond the premieres, through loans, participation in interviews and maintaining contact with media representatives.

The growth and maintenance of a media profile requires a network of contacts extending to photographers, event organizers, curators, editors and so on, as well as a baggage of technical, organizational and communication skills to deliver the best communication material possible. But the *Designers* of our days not only have to be skilled in crafting their communication material; they also need to be able to manage their relationship with the media industry. Hella Jongerius more than others has described her strategies in setting some limits to the liaison with the voracious media industry, always in need of visual material, interviews and visits to her studio. FormaFantasma have related more about the work that taking part in exhibitions and making their designed pieces tour “like pop-stars” (AT0:15:40) requires. For *Designers*, setting rules like asking for participation fees when taking part in exhibitions or deciding not to indulge in hosting media-representatives for the making of videos about the studio, are necessary limitations for running a sustainable design practice.

*Designers* are now used to and comfortable with the idea that their creations will be consumed in the form of *Displays* and *Images*. Presenting at popular design fairs or publishing their works in non-design magazines is a way to reach a broader audience, also outside the strictly design community. The visual consumption of the designed exclusive items suggests an extension, a tangent, of the traditional design process to the point that phases like photo-shooting, generation of teasers, press releases, loans to exhibitions become streamlined within it. As a consequence, the new contexts where design is represented have led to a paradigm shift in the profession of some *Designers*. These professionals no longer address the traditional actors like industrial manufacturers and big distributors, but have to deal instead with a number of other actors such as curators, gallery directors, editors, exhibition designers and so on as crucial interlocutors for their activity.

Besides using commissions as a way to feed their media profiles, *Designers* have to think strategically of how to profit economically after commissions are completed. This study has proved that commissions commonly do not represent a direct gain; often they only suffice to cover production and organizational expenses. However the great *Autonomy* granted to *Designers* allows them to think of commercial developments for the projects also once commissions are completed. So the *Designers* should advantageously foresee where and how to propose their projects. Consequently, besides the network of *Agents of Media Profile* able to provide *Visibility* and *Reputation*, *Designers* should cultivate a network of galleries, clients and collectors that might be interested in selling or buying their artefacts.

### 6.2.3.2 A NEW FORM OF TRADING

In this context of design, it appears that each commission defines a different form of trading to the others, and this is because the agenda of the *Commissioners* varies. For example, while some *Commissioners* are concerned with the sale of the designed *Pieces*, others have shown no interest in it. Similarly, while some *Commissioners* have a media profile

in the design industry, others do not. These variables among commissions lead to a variety of conditions, agendas and capitals that *Designers* and *Commissioners* invest in and pursue as stakeholders. However, generalizations can be made.

The study has observed that beyond the trade of the artefacts, the *Designers'* work represents an important way to explore and materialize the identity of the *Commissioners*. The creative *Autonomy* that *Designers* are given allows them to think and develop artefacts that say something about the context provided by *Commissioners*, or about themselves if that is what the *Commissioners* are interested in (i.e., Hella Jongerius for Phaidon Press).

Once it had been acknowledged that the content of the design work was valuable for *Commissioners* and *Designers* because ultimately it contributed to defining the identities of both, during the main and preliminary studies it appeared clear that what fueled this niche of the design industry was a sizeable trade of *Visibility* and *Reputation*. The fact that premieres, participation in events and publications are planned by the *Commissioners* already at early stages of the projects are just hints of the real purpose of the commissions. The further effort of the *Designers* to circulate their projects in the mediated contexts is also a symptom of the *Designers'* pursuit of *Visibility*. *Designers* need such *Visibility* to feed their media profiles, *Commissioners* benefit from the *Visibility* because it allows them to make their names known in contexts where otherwise it would be difficult for them to be present. These contexts, like museums and magazines, are permeated with cultural connotations; it is through them that a trade of *Reputation* often occurs.

The model adopted by current *Designers*, which extends their role from that of designing artefacts to that of designing, producing and distributing *Images* and *Displays* of the artefacts, points at services that conventionally would be provided by communication and public relations agencies. The preparation and distribution of visual materials and press releases across a network of media representatives, as well as the organization of and participation in events are in fact activities that could be ascribed to other practices than that of the conventional design studios. This extension of the current design model has led to a new economy, a new trade operating in the design industry.

*Designers* can now trade their skills in producing desirable materials for the media industry. Furthermore, *Designers* can trade their access to a network of media representatives which facilitates their media-presence, all the while knowing how to share such visibility with their commissioners. Finally, they trade their widespread appeal as cultural intermediaries, which allows them to occupy the cultural contexts. As this study observed, these three elements are not to be taken separately but all interact with each other. The combination of skills, network and cultural appeal is what empowers *Designers* with *Visibility* and *Reputation*. The *Designers'* *Visibility* and *Reputation* are represented in their media profile.

Crediting is a common way for *Designers* to trade their *Visibility* and *Reputation* and has

become an important part of the design profession. Crediting is the act through which the names of *Commissioners* and *Designers*, and possibly also *Enablers*, are bonded together in the project. However, as this research has highlighted, crediting does not derive from a formal commitment of the *Designers*, but rather from an informal agreement between the two parties. The value of credits is not quantified, and maybe not even quantifiable, in an economic sense. *Designers* are not paid according to how many times they credit their *Commissioners* in interviews, loans or articles of any sort. Still, during the study, the appreciation of *Commissioners* for the credits has emerged several times, especially in those cases in which *Designers* provided further *Visibility* through loans to other exhibitions. Besides *Designers* and *Commissioners*, the *Enablers* are usually also attracted by the *Visibility* provided by the projects. In this study this was the case for rug company Nodus which supported Lanzavecchia + Wai's project, but also the Austrian Ministry or the Dutch Government that support their local designers, or other collaborators offering their technical support in exchange for some credit.

Once it has been acknowledged that the media profile of the *Designers* represents their capital of *Visibility* and *Reputation*, which is much valued in the design industry, the distance from the previous generations of designers appears even greater. The review of the historic context in design has shown how the previous generation of designers – represented by Eames and Loewe for example – had to be successful within the industry in order to be appealing to the media. Now that relationship has been inverted: today a designer has to be successful in the media in order to be appealing to the industry.

### 6.2.3.3 SUMMARY

In synthesis, this thesis has proved that *Designers* have developed skills and networks to circulate their works across the mediated contexts through *Images* and *Displays*. The *Design, Production and Distribution* of *Images* and *Displays* define a new design model that extends beyond the conventional one limited to artefacts. It is then in the form of *Display* and *Image*, rather than *Piece*, that the projects reach the broader audience of readers and visitors, rather than users. The current design model requires new skills and a different network to that of conventional designers, in order to reach the best results also in terms of communication.

The role of the current *Designers* extends from that of designing artefacts to that of designing, producing and distributing *Images* and *Displays* of the artefacts, thus pointing at services that conventionally would be provided by communication and public relations agencies. In terms of the content of their designs, *Designers* trade their ability to explore and visualize the identity of the *Commissioners*. This contributes to building a recognizable *Reputation* for the *Commissioners*. In a less direct manner, *Designers* trade their cultural connotation with the *Commissioners*. Besides this, by commissioning selected *Designers*, *Commissioners* ensure

a spot for themselves in the *Designers'* media profiles. Such trade takes the form of crediting, whether it is in exhibitions, articles or interviews. Thus *Designers* provide *Visibility* thanks to their skills in producing material for circulation and networks across *Agents of Media Profile*. However, *Commissioners* also trade *Visibility* with the *Designers*. In fact, *Commissioners* usually organize premieres and participation in events, which provide an initial dose of *Visibility*. Ultimately, commissions represent a way for *Commissioners* and *Designers* to feed each other's media profiles and *Visibility* emerges as a commodity appreciated by both *Designers* and *Commissioners*.

## 6.3 WHAT COMMODITIES (INTENDED AS THE ENSEMBLE OF GOODS, VALUES, COMPETENCIES AND SERVICES) ARE TRADED IN THE CONTEMPORARY DESIGN INDUSTRY AND BY WHOM?

The answers provided to the research aims provide information to now answer the research question.

This research has observed that in this context of design, commissions generally result from the combination of four fundamental elements:

- The *Financial Value* to make the project happen, thus covering production costs and those of the premiere, which is provided by the *Commissioners*.
- The great *Autonomy* given by the *Commissioners* to the *Designers* to explore a given theme.
- The *Reputation* prevalently provided by *Designers* who contribute to building a recognizable identity for the *Commissioners* through their work and providing a cultural connotation thanks to their network of cultural institutions.
- The prospect of achieving *Visibility* that can contribute to raising the *Designer* and *Commissioner's* media profiles.

There are then accessory offerings that can render the commissions appealing to the *Designers*. According to what the *Commissioners' agendas* are, the *Designers* can be promised royalty fees if the *Commissioner* sells the designed items, or the *Autonomy* to commercially exploit the project independently after the commission is completed. Furthermore, *Visibility* is usually offered by the *Commissioners* who might have already organized the events and publications, while the *Designers* promulgate the project through exhibitions and media thanks to their networks of *Agents of Media Profile*, like journalists, critics, editors, curators and event organizers. Both *Commissioners* and *Designers* benefit from the *Visibility* and *Reputation*

afforded by the *Agents of Media Profile*.

This research has highlighted the centrality of *Visibility* and *Reputation* as dominating commodities in the trade occurring in the design industry. During the study, *Visibility* and *Reputation* have remained often intertwined, one facilitating the other. On the one hand, the occupation of the mediated contexts of events and publications has often been synonymous with validation, thus raising *Reputation*. On the other hand, the cultural *Reputation* provided by museums and exhibitions has led to more *Visibility* in the media. This thesis has proved that *Designers* usually possess skills and networks to guarantee the circulation of these two commodities, and it is also for such reasons that they are appealing to the industry.

*Designers* are now cultural intermediaries, able to occupy the cultural – but also consumerist – contexts of magazines, exhibitions and other media. *Designers* are able to expand, materialize and visualize the identities and contexts of their *Commissioners* in the form of *Pieces*, *Displays* and *Images*, so that they can be circulated through the media. Besides, the cultural allure of the *Designers* deriving from their familiarity with museums and cultural institutions translates into a trade of *Reputation* with the *Commissioners* who associate themselves with them.

While *Reputation* is often provided by *Designers*, *Visibility* is instead a commodity that circulates more freely in the design industry, with *Designers* and *Commissioners* exchanging it with each other through premieres, loans and PR activities. The six case studies, when focusing on the selected commissions, have all depicted an industry that revolves around the need for *Visibility*. The first case study saw commissioner Mariette Dölle of art institutions Witte de With and Tent measuring the success of the commission through the publications and appearances of the Wood Ring Bench in exhibitions, while designer Chris Kabel crafted and distributed an iconic image of the outcome. The second case study observed commissioner Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte of Carwan Gallery organizing a performance during Design Days Dubai festival and the relevant relationship with media partner BrownBook, while *Designers* Mischer'Traxler designed an artefact that depicted the identity of Carwan Gallery to represent it in the events. The third case study featured commissioner Droog assigning a project for design festivals in Milan and Basel, while designers Minale-Maeda distributed press releases of the resulting mirror through their network of media-representatives, thus sparking a reaction culminating in the Wallpaper annual award, much appreciated by the commissioner. The fourth case study showed how publisher Phaidon Press commissioned designer Hella Jongerius in order to generate content for their next book. Meanwhile designer Hella Jongerius provided the opportunity to premiere the project at the Boijmans Museum in Rotterdam and designed the installation for it. The fifth case study saw magazine Case da Abitare organizing events to advertise commissioning partner Mercedes-Benz. *Designers* Lanzavecchia + Wai designed an artefact that interpreted the identity of the German automotive brand and enjoyed the *Visibility* offered by the events. The sixth case study saw cultural institution Fondazione Plart commissioning a design to present during the Salone del



Mobile in Milan, while designers FormaFantasma interpreted their commissioners' identity, provided contacts for the premiere, designed the installation and press releases for it and further promoted the projects in exhibitions and media.

Besides the selected commissions, also when the interviewees spoke more broadly about the industry, the thread underlining their reflections did not change; it was always *Visibility* that sparked commissions, motivated *Designers* to promote the resulting projects further and got partners involved. At the end of this research, it appeared evident that the main reason for commissions to take place was the *Designers* and *Commissioners'* desire to enhance their respective media profiles through the project. After having analyzed and interpreted the case studies, the questions raised by the results are simple and at the same time representative of the design industry: would those projects have happened if there had been no Salone del Mobile of Milan? If there were no Design Miami/Basel or other event, and if there were no design blog or magazine, would those *Commissioners* have turned to the *Designers*? And also, would those *Designers* have accepted if they had not had a media profile to take care of?

*Designers* showed a genuine interest in the challenges that the projects offered. The contexts presented by the *Commissioners* as well as the *Autonomy* they were granted represented an interesting opportunity for *Designers* to take advantage of. At the same time, the *Visibility* offered constituted an appealing incentive to take on the commissions. The possibility of exhibiting at popular venues for the design industry as well as the prospect of having new content to circulate in the newsletters and updates was part of the reason why *Designers* accepted the commissions. Similarly, the *Commissioners* surely had an interest in the resulting projects – in some cases also as artefacts to sell – but it is inevitable to note how their measure for evaluating the success of the commissions was constituted by the *Visibility* projects generated, where the pieces were exhibited and published. The analyses of process and trade indicate the great consideration of *Designers* and *Commissioners* for the contexts of media and events and the *Visibility* that they generate. Katharina Mischer of Mischer'Traxler controversially and clearly states that “*certain projects only happen because of media coverage*” (MT1:04:04). Whether it is the *Designers* or the *Commissioners* that entice this, it is clear that *Visibility* is a necessary factor for the *Commissions* to take place.

The research highlighted the great exchange of *Visibility* between *Designers* and *Commissioners*. However, each time a trade between these two actors took place, the *Agents of Media Profile* were also involved. Consequently, the *Agents of Media Profile* proved to be a necessary passage for the commission to extend itself and therefore be considered successful. By looking for *Visibility*, the *Commissioners* and *Designers* are therefore unavoidably generating content for the media industry. The *Agents of Media Profile*, whether as event organizers, curators, editors or journalists, distributed *Visibility* and allowed the trade to take place. If *Visibility* is the currency, then the *Agents of Media Profile* are the banks that control such capital. This notion allows for the observation of new significant models in the design industry whose evidence is to be found in some of the case studies.



In the research, those *Commissioners* that traditionally belong to the media industry, like publisher Phaidon Press and magazine Case da Abitare, offered two interesting examples of how the border between *Agents of Media Profile* and *Commissioners* can be transient. In particular the case study concerning Mercedes-Benz and Case da Abitare highlights how *Commissioners* who possess *Visibility* within the design industry can offer this commodity to other stakeholders. The events organized by Case da Abitare represented an appealing opportunity for Mercedes-Benz to benefit from the *Visibility* of the design spectacle, so Mercedes-Benz agreed to invest money to be part of it. Case da Abitare used their network within the design community to engage young designers, offering them the budget to realize prototypes and the *Visibility* represented by the events Case da Abitare organized. Like in a chain reaction, such *Visibility* was also offered by the *Designers* to the *Enablers* (i.e., manufacturers) that realized their prototypes, accepting the *Visibility* granted by the events as partial payment. In this case, *Visibility* emerges clearly as the commodity through which partners and designers are rewarded. The model adopted by Phaidon Press is different, but equally interesting. Phaidon Press commissioned designer Hella Jongerius for what then became a collection of 300 Coloured Vases. The project was subsequently flattened and infinitely reproduced in the form of the monographic book Misfit. Commissioner Phaidon Press realized a model that finances the design of a few artefacts to then capitalize on its printed representation, and of course the sale of those few vases to collectors and museums. By commissioning new content and at the same time providing the media channels through which to promulgate the projects, these two commissioners proved to be able to monetize the *Visibility* of the commissions. In both cases, the commodity of trade was far from being represented by the designed artefacts. The few designed artefacts emerged merely as the necessary props to mold the many representations in the form of exhibitions and publications.

In conclusion, the *Process Charts* and *Trade Maps* of this thesis, as well as the considerations that they informed, and the information from the contextual review point to an industry in which the exchanged commodities are much more intangible than the circulating artefacts. *Reputation* and *Visibility* have emerged as crucial commodities in the design industry. *Designers* have proved to possess and manage *Reputation* and *Visibility* as commodities to trade. At the same time, *Commissioners* have proved to benefit from these and to be able to create the conditions for such trade to happen. *Agents of Media Profile* have emerged as those allowing the exchange to take place and have also shown the possibility of an exchange of roles with the *Commissioners*. This is so because they are those who, more than other actors in the industry, know how to monetize the *Visibility* that circulates. It is undeniable that the media industry is now embedded in the design industry, having become an integral part of it. *Visibility* has therefore become the muse and the currency of contemporary design, all to the good of those who own and manage such currency.

### 6.3.1 SUMMARY

This thesis has shown that commissions are generally inputted by some *Financial Value* made available by the *Commissioners* to cover production costs, great *Autonomy* for the *Designers* to investigate the given context and the prospect of an exchange of *Visibility* between *Commissioners* and *Designers* empowered by the *Agents of Media Profile*. The six case studies have highlighted the crucial role that *Visibility* and *Reputation* play in the design industry. The designed artefacts exploring the given topics and expanding and visualizing the identities of the *Commissioners* represent the outcome of the commissions. These artefacts are then circulated through media and exhibitions. Once a *Commissioner* is credited in a new work, the *Commissioner* can access cultural and commercial contexts such as museums, events and magazines among others, thus fostering *Visibility* and *Reputation*. This circulation, often facilitated by the skills, networks and *Reputation* of the *Designers*, represents the real purpose of the commissions as it raises the media profiles of *Commissioners* and *Designers*. *Visibility* can therefore be considered the fuel of this industry. *Agents of Media Profile* are those that distribute *Visibility* across all the actors involved in the project. Therefore, the *Agents of Media Profile* are powerful players in this industry to the point that they can substitute the *Commissioners* and – as they are able to monetize the circulation of *Images* and *Displays* – commission new content to the *Designers*. Among the six case studies of this thesis, this exchange of roles occurred twice. In those two cases, actors like Case da Abitare and Phaidon Press, which would conventionally be placed in the *Agents of Media Profile* category, instead covered the role of the *Commissioners*. Case da Abitare traded its network of *Designers* and its ability to organize events to co-commissioner Mercedes-Benz. Phaidon Press used its know-how as a publisher to commission Hella Jongerius for a limited edition collection and monetized its unlimited representation in the form of a book. So, besides depicting *Visibility* as a crucial force within the design industry, this thesis has provided hints that the dominance of this commodity can enable an exchange of roles among the actors involved.

## 6.4 CONTRIBUTION TO NEW KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

This doctoral research has explored a context that the existing literature does not sufficiently cover. In doing so the research has resulted in insights and contributions to the topic of enquiry. These contributions can be summarized as:

- **A new understanding of the trade in the contemporary design industry including the key actors**

This thesis has observed the centrality of *Visibility* and *Reputation* as commodities for trade in the design industry. The research has highlighted the roles of *Designers*, *Commissioners* and *Agents of Media Profile* in the circulation of such commodities. Besides, it has described the *Autonomy* granted to *Designers* in a creative, commercial and managerial sense. The research has also discussed the way in which *Financial Value* is offered in the form of budgets, rather than true gain. The combination of the offers renders commissions possible, pushing *Designers* to think strategically when committing to such commissions. This means that they have to think of how they will benefit in terms of media profile as well as economically from the commissions after the completion of the commission, that is, after the delivery of the designed artefacts.

- **A new understanding of the media profile in design**

Conventionally the media profile is defined as the presence in the media of a professional or company. This thesis deepens the knowledge of the matter, describing the media profile in design as the ensemble of skills, network and reputation. Skills are related to the competences for producing *Images* and *Displays* to represent the projects in the media and exhibitions. Network is represented by the contacts with *Agents of Media Profile* for distributing the project. *Reputation* derives from the association with cultural institutions, which results in a cultural status for the *Designers*. This research has observed that *Designers* in this context of design possess these three characteristics.

- **A new understanding of the design process**

Conventionally, the design process in the context of product design focuses on the activities that are directly related to the conception, design, production, distribution and consumption of the artefacts, more recently extending to their dismissal and recycling. This research has expanded the notion of the design process beyond the artefact – in this thesis referred to as the *Piece* – highlighting the role that its representation, whether as an *Image* or *Display*, has in the process. The *Display* of the projects has often been in the plans of the commission since its beginning, as the premier exhibition usually defines the deadlines for the projects. In a few cases the context for the presentation even affected the design of the pieces. The participation

in events appeared in this study as an integral part of the commission. The research has also highlighted the care of the *Designers* for the *Image* and the *Display* of the projects so as to convey the messages and meanings of the projects. The *Image* and *Display* have revealed themselves as essential outcomes for extending the commission and reaching an audience. This view of the design process, which embeds the representation of the products in the mediated contexts and the impact of this throughout the whole process, represents an indicative original model for studying the design process.

- **Two new tools for observing the design process and the trade occurring among the actors involved.**

The *Process Charts* and *Trade Maps* described in the methodology of this thesis and used to analyze the six case studies represent an original tool for observing the design process and trade among the participating actors. These two tools have proved useful in organizing the data of the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews. The *Process Charts* consist of a grid with three tiers indicating the three outcomes of a design project (*Piece*, *Display*, *Image*) and five columns for the phases of the process (*Commission*, *Design*, *Production*, *Distribution*, *Consumption*). In the resulting fifteen slots, quotes from the transcripts have been arranged, thus allowing a clear organization of the information and also the comparison across case studies to highlight trends and patterns. The *Trade Maps* consist of a list of actors as they appeared in the interviews and divided across pre-set categories according to their roles in the commissions. Arrows connecting the donor and the recipient represent quotes from the transcripts suggesting a trade between two or more actors. By conveniently changing the thickness of the arrows according to how many times the same trade was mentioned and by using a pre-set colour-code for the commodities of trade, it is possible to display the trade occurring in the commissions. However, that is just how *Trade Maps* have been adopted for this study. *Trade Maps* allow freedom for any researcher to make different design choices, finding different coding systems, simplifying or adding more parameters. For example, in this study, the distance between the elements or their position in the space did not respond to any criteria, but in a different study those parameters could be taken into consideration. The *Trade Maps* involve a design process rather than a prescribed formula. Both tools – the *Process Charts* and *Trade Maps* –, which apparently translate the quality of the information into quantitative factors (i.e., number of quotes in a slot, thickness of the arrows...), in reality serve as a visual index to then discuss the information further, thus not losing the quality of the information, but rather helping organize it.

## 6.5 FUTURE WORK

This doctoral investigation could represent the starting point for new research. Possible future research studies could include the following:

- **Extending the study to other contexts than the one with high *Media Attention* and low *Physical Accessibility*; as well as exploring the process and trade occurring in the cases from other realms of design (i.e., fashion or transportations design).**

In the introduction to this thesis, the contexts of design discussed in this research were presented (Figure 1.01). The framework related *Media Attention* to *Physical Accessibility*, thus defining four different quadrants. This thesis focused on the top-left quadrant, that of high *Media Attention* and low *Physical Accessibility*. It would be advisable to conduct similar investigations in the other three quadrants. For example, what is the commodity of trade in the industry characterized by low *Media Attention* and high *Physical Accessibility*? Who are the networks and key actors of those contexts? What services and skills do the designers in those contexts provide? These questions could lead to interesting research and comparisons, thus expanding the existing knowledge about design process and trade. Furthermore, the literature review has touched on analogies with the fashion industry. It would be useful to explore those analogies further by extending the case studies to other realms of design than product or furniture design. In fact, the same framework could be adapted to fashion and transportation design where the impact of the media industry is also remarkable. Lastly, also an extension of the geographical limits by including cases from outside the European context could improve the understanding on the matter of this thesis.

- **Improving and further exploring the Process Charts and Trade Maps as tools for analyzing and displaying information.**

The *Process Charts* and *Trade Maps* have shown to be useful tools throughout this research. However, their effectiveness would need to be tested further in other research activities that observe the design process and trade. They could also be tested against other methods in order to learn more about them and possibly improve them. In the case of this research these two tools have been inputted with data deriving from semi-structured interviews. Nevertheless, in order to explore their potential further, it would be beneficial to experiment also with information originated by other activities for data gathering, such as structured interviews, shadowing sessions or surveys.

- **Including the point of view of the *Agents of Media Profile*.**

This research has concluded by highlighting the central role of the *Agents of Media Profile* in the trade and their impact on the design process. However, the study has only gathered information from *Designers* and *Commissioners*, leaving out the point of view of media representatives and professionals involved in the design events. This research could be a

starting point for studies that investigate that aspect of the industry, trying to tap into the models and reasoning of editors, curators, event organizers and journalists, for example.

- **Reviewing the emerging models that *Designers, Commissioners and Agents of Media Profile* are adopting, and thinking of new ones.**

This research has explored a new context for academic research, that is, the study of the design profession in relation to the media presence of design. In doing so, it has broadly described the current design industry in relation to factors like *Visibility* and *Reputation*. Throughout the research there have been hints of new business models for anyone involved in the contemporary design industry, which are based on the presence of design in the mediated contexts. It would be useful to work on a more extended review of these models. A review of the emergent business models in relation to the media presence of design should also inspire professionals to think of new models for design media and design practitioners. Such a review could reveal more about the current design industry and at the same time inform the next generation of designers that are being trained by design schools now.

## 6.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Especially in Europe, the production industry is in decline, while the media industry seems to be in constant ascent. For trained product, industrial and furniture designers the current situation represents a professional crisis. The fact that the once consolidated royalty system does not suffice to support the designers, reflects the economic crisis the design profession is facing. Consequently, designers find themselves having to face this shift and re-interpret their profession accordingly.

The designers included in this research have proved to be players of the culture industry much more than the production industry. As design is much more concerned with visibility and reputation, rather than the sale of actual products, a new way of evaluating design work would be beneficial. If visibility and reputation are the commodities of trade of this industry and designers are starting to provide the services of PR, branding and communication agencies, then the criteria for evaluating the designers' works economically should be according to the visibility and reputation they circulate. In that sense, traces of new business models adopted by the designers are emerging. Within the research the participation fees requested by FormaFantasma and Mischer'Traxler when taking part in exhibitions are a direct way of converting visibility and reputation into financial value. Beyond the scope of the research, it is possible to observe how Spanish designer Marti Guixé has partnered with an agency that manages the rights relating to the use of his projects' images, thus monetizing from the trade of those images. During the Salone del Mobile in Milan 2011, British designer Tom Dixon exhibited in conjunction with electronics company RIM, which was then launching its new product – the Playbook tablet. The connection between Tom Dixon's designs and the Playbook is nil; there is no trace of Tom Dixon's design in the RIM products. RIM was simply looking for a stage on which to advertise its product. The trade-off offered by Tom Dixon was clearly represented by his visibility at the Salone del Mobile in Milan and the resulting media reports.

During our conversation, designer Mario Minale confessed that designers do not know how to monetize their capital of visibility. Then he joked about including advertisements on his website to exploit the traffic that publication on popular design web-media generates – perhaps without realizing that all the credits to commissioners, sponsors and partners of all kinds that are present on designers' websites already represent advertising. When you land on Formafantasma's website, a pre-home page that lists all the awards, exhibitions, acquisitions and news, all carefully mentioning the brands, institutions, curators, critics and commissioners involved, welcomes you. This page, which appears even before the design work is shown, is representative of the new trade in the design industry.

The power and reach of the design media has allowed them to diversify into other activities

aside from publishing web posts about design. For instance, Dezeen – which claims to be the largest design magazine in the world – also features a recruitment site, an online watch store, a series of pop-up physical stores in London, a series of talks worldwide, exhibitions in conjunction with international design events, a platform for the promotion of independent music producers and also a printed book. Likewise, Designboom is involved in similar activities. Magazines Wallpaper and Monocle have blurred the line between design and other realms, such as lifestyle, popular culture and economics. Copies of these magazines find themselves interspersed between print media staples such as Vogue and the Economist in the magazine stands. Their ubiquity within the realm of information and communication has allowed them to cover any matter, while still keeping a strong correlation with design. They can publish city guides; award selected designers and designs with yearly titles; commission, produce, brand and distribute their own items. They can even open sleek design shops in the trendiest cities around the globe. The print and web media that have embraced new business and content models are influential actors within the design industry. It is not by chance that Dezeen has been included by Time magazine as one of the “100 most influential forces in global design”. As for the organizers of design events, a similar observation can be made. Think of the transmigration to Berlin of the Ventura Lambrate exhibitions, one of the main venues at the Milan Fuorisalone. It is evident how the credibility and charm of the Ventura Lambrate venue is easily adopted outside the homonymous Milanese neighbourhood to better advertise events. The recent acquisition of the annual 100% Design London event by company Media 10 Ltd. for an undisclosed price also invites us to reconsider design events as goods in their own right and with their own economies.

The mediating entities have expanded within the design industry, to the point that they can be legitimately considered representatives of design. It is one peculiarity of the spectacle to elide the difference between representation and content, giving both the same weight and appeal. The result of the overlap of the medium with the content is that media “become design” on a par with the designers, brands and design schools they feature in their content. Hints of this shift were already evident in 1983, when Domus Academy – a design school – sprang from the rib of Domus Magazine – a design medium.

Similar to designers, the design media possess the visibility, aesthetics and appeal of design, so that distinguishing between these entities and their roles becomes a hard task for the consumers. Dezeen, Design Miami, Tom Dixon, Cappellini, Design Academy Eindhoven – just to mention a few – all equally represent design, simply because they all enjoy and offer visibility and prominence in the design context, independently from their tangible presence in the industry. The image-based essence of contemporary design allows great fluidity among designers, design brands and design media. For anyone involved in the design industry, the only way not to sink in such fluidity is to learn how to swim again.





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# **THE COMMODITY OF TRADE IN CONTEMPORARY DESIGN**

GIOVANNI INNELLA

Volume 2 of 2  
APPENDIX



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# **APPENDIX I: THE GAZETTE OF DESIGN**



# The Gaze<sup>lle</sup> of Design

- Design as it happens to be -

A SURVEY PROVES THAT DESIGNERS TEND TO TAKE CARE OF PR'S BY THEMSELVES

## Designers turn into PRs

*Public Relations is managed differently among designers. In any case it appears to be an important part of their work.*

HOLLAND

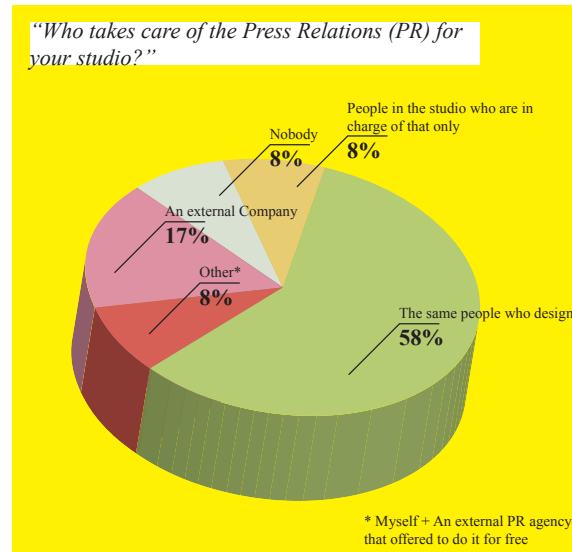
Generating and managing communication with a number of other actors, ranging from editors, curators, journalists and other professionals in the network is a vital activity for the designers that want to keep a high media profile.

Surprisingly, the majority (58%) of the selected Designers takes care of their Public Relations by themselves.

This is probably due to the limited resources of the studios, but also to the will of designing and controlling communication just as a design process that completes the one generating the physical artifacts.

This second observation might find confirmation in the fact that the majority of designers (58%) takes pictures of their works by themselves or does the art direction while a photographer is in charge of the actual shooting (8%). Only 33% of the designers works together with the photographer on the art direction, and no designer let other professionals do the artistic direction of the photo shooting.

One designer denies the presence of anybody working for his Public Relations, still this designer proves to have high visibility on design



related media and events. It would be interesting to know how he achieves such a result. We can either suppose that he defines his activity of communication as something else than PR or that other actors, such as galleries, museums, auction houses, cover that role for him.

In this specific context of design we are trying to observe, in fact, many actors have a quite developed activity of PR and this might

allow the designer to avoid doing PR himself, exploiting the others instead.

Three designers entrust their Public Relations to an external agency (only two do it entirely, one shares that task with the agency). This raises questions about what are the economical deals behind their agreements and what are the actual benefits of doing so.



*For this issue we've talked to 12 designers, alumni of the Design Academy of Eindhoven*

Though our research we want to understand how designers happen to contribute to the industry that spins around the representation of design, constituted by design events, magazines and websites.

We also want to comprehend what is their perception of those contexts and what are the motivations that drives them to be part of that world. We selected 12 alumni from Design Academy of Eindhoven because they are representatives for the Designers that populate that realm of design characterized by a considerable visibility on the contexts mentioned above. Selected designers are under 36, graduated from the Dutch School between 2000 and 2009 and currently based in Europe. They have established themselves as designers, mainly through participation to international design events and publications, both online and on paper. In fact they haven't designed anything for larger productions and their works are sold mainly through galleries. Some of their projects have been acquired by prestigious public and private collections.



**VISIBILITY.** A view on the troubled relation between designers, media and events

HOW MUCH IS VISIBILITY ON MEDIA AND EVENTS A PROFITABLE ACTIVITY FOR THE DESIGNERS IN OUR CONSIDERATION?

## “Visibility is not our business”

*We asked designers how rewarding it is for them, on a personal and economic level, to have their work exhibited or published. Here their answers.*

### HOLLAND

The exhibition and the publication of their works constitute an important mean for designers towards both economical and personal achievements.

When working on relatively small quantities in terms of physical production, visibility can help in reaching other members of the community, transforming them into active actors of the designers' network. Indeed, it is through events and publications that gallerists, collectors, curators and other professionals are often informed on the Designers' activities.

Although visibility plays an important economic role, the sense of personal reward emerges as a stronger achievement for designers. Whether their work is exhibited, featured on a design magazine or posted on a website, Designers declare to reach higher satisfaction on a personal level than on an economic one.

The role of design media and Events is supposedly the one of acknowledging the creative value and originality of the work, thus helping designers to build their reputation as authors. It is notable in this sense that all the designers point at “Good design critique” as one of the most important qualities for a design magazine, while only one designer on twelve includes “commercial relevance for my business” among the three most important qualities.

This is a crucial aspect in the way designers perceive

the Industry spinning around representation of design, in fact it can be seen as the driving force for designers to invest efforts and resources to enter the context of publications that provide credibility to their work.

The economic benefits instead are not a direct consequence of visibility, and more steps are required to monetize from that. However design events appear to be the context with a stronger economic connotation, in fact 75% of the designers ticks “Commercial relevance for my activity” as one of the most important features for design venues.

The commercial role played by design events is confirmed by other results. When asked the question “What is more important for your commercial activity?”, 91% of the designer declares their preference for exhibitions over printed and on-line publications.

Identical result and percentage occurs when designers are asked about what is more personally rewarding.

To conclude and recap we can state that visibility is for designers more of a personal matter than an economic one, and that design events cover a more important role on both levels if compared with publications.

As a loose interpretation of the data, we can guess that visibility provides designers of a professional status, characterized - maybe - by greater creative freedom, thus defining a professional space

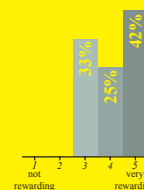
for the designers.

Although providing a space and a profile for the designers, visibility seems to fail in providing a network of reliable actors able to engage profitable professional relationships with the designers.

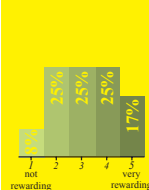
How rewarding is for you to...

...Exhibit at Design Events?

Personal Level

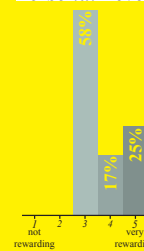


Economic Level



...Be published on Design Magazines?

Personal Level



Economic Level

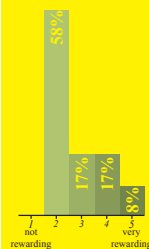


...Be published on Design Websites?

Personal Level



Economic Level





## CONTEXTS. A comparison of Designers' preference on design vs. non-design contexts

DESIGNERS FIND PUBLICATIONS ON NON-DESIGN-MEDIA MORE REWARDING ON A PERSONAL LEVEL

# Design and beyond...

*A discrepancy between economic and personal reward emerges in Designers' preference of being featured on design or non-design related media.*

HOLLAND

The recent overspill of design onto popular media such as daily newspapers, and weekly or monthly magazine publications is probably ascribable to the growth of the image industry as a whole together with the need for traditional and new media to reach new content. Although causes for this phenomenon are not easy to be identified, this expansion resulted into the opportunity for design to be featured on magazines and websites, beyond the ones strictly related to the subject of design. Designers happen, therefore, to access popular websites and magazines, reaching - at least on a visual level - a broader audience than the one with a specific interest in design.

We asked designers how they feel about witnessing their work being featured on the Media outside the Design circuit.

On an economical level, non-design media are said to be less relevant to the business of the selected designers, but still in line with the general low economic relevance of design media noted by designers. On a personal level, instead, publications on media outside the ones of the design context are sensibly higher valued by the authors of the objects.

This information offers the opportunity for some considerations.

More specifically, we can reflect on the ambitions of the selected designers to establish themselves as authors beyond the limits of the world of design and with a greater impact on popular culture.

Design media represent design for the community of experts, professionals and aficionados, ideally addressing to an

audience of competent people creating a dialogue between actors of the same network. Designers perceive the focus to this audience as a constraint: while design is the context in which they operate, they appreciate when society gives them recognition as interpreters of popular culture through non-design media.

This thinking extends the conception of authorship beyond the borders of design to a much more extensive meaning.

Arguably the selected designers try to achieve this social status through objects that belong to a quite familiar context as a domestic environment (mainly seats, tables and furniture in general), pushing attention towards experimental manufacturing processes or concepts behind

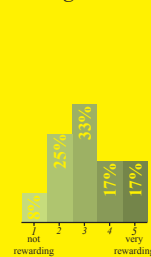
the objects. The challenge for them is to generate a final visual result that is able to catch viewers attention with its unusual aesthetics.

In some ways, such a conclusion would support the idea that objects generated within this context of design are conceived as goods for visual consumption.

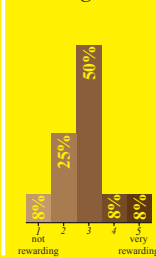
Further studies on this topic might help in confuting or confirming these conjectures.

*On an economic level, how rewarding is for you to have your work published on...*

...Design Magazines



...Non-Design Magazines



*On a personal level, how rewarding is for you to have your work published on...*

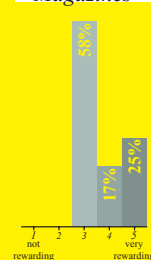
...Design Websites



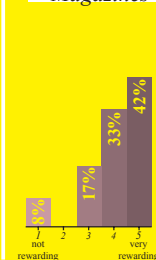
...Non-Design Websites



...Design Magazines



...Non-Design Magazines





## SNIPPETS. Little information that emerges from our survey

### Show me something I won't use

*Designers exhibit and publish works that are not accessible to most people*

Selected designers declare to have exhibited and published their graduation projects (100%), personal works (92%), prototypes (92%), limited editions (83% in events and magazines, 75% on websites). 63% of the designers have exhibited and published on magazines commission works (75% on web), the percentage drops to 33% when it comes to series production.

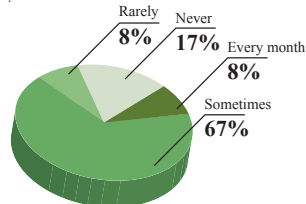
Please note, not all the designers have designed objects for series production!

### Who stole my pictures?

*Designers' limited control over images of their work, causes discontent*

From our questionnaire, it emerges that designers aren't always able to keep control over the published images of their objects. Although this is not something that occurs often, it still irritates some of the designers when it happens. Why? It needs to be found out, I guess.

*How often do you encounter printed publications featuring your work, without your express permission?*



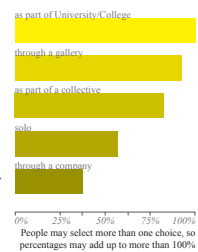
### From Design Academy to the galleries (avoiding companies)

*Companies result to be the least common mean for exhibiting*

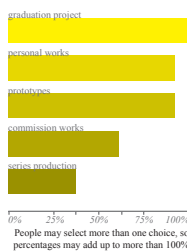
The fact that all the designers in consideration have exhibited through Design Academy, shouldn't be surprising as traditionally the Dutch school takes to Milan and other venues a selection of graduates. What is remarkable, instead is that galleries are the second most popular (92%) intermediary for exhibiting in international fairs. Third we find design collectives (83%) and fourth are Solo shows (58%). Only 33% of the designers exhibited through a company.

Reasons for this have to be most likely researched in the specific network that spins around Design Academy Eindhoven. In fact, The Dutch school constitutes an introduction to the world of galleries.

*"In your career you have exhibited..."*



*"In your career what have you exhibited or publish on magazines?"*



0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

People may select more than one choice, so percentages may add up to more than 100%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

People may select more than one choice, so percentages may add up to more than 100%

### The Dutch forget London

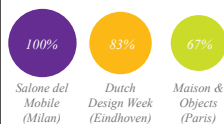
*Here is the list of the most popular design events among our designers*

Dealing with designers educated in Holland, we surely would have expected that they had, during their careers, exhibited at the Salone del Mobile in Milan (100% of them), for its universal relevance, and at the Dutch Design Week (83%) for its geographic convenience and professional familiarity. However, we are quite surprised of seeing the Parisian event of Maison & Objects as the third (67%) most popular event among our designers. The French venue, although definitely less known than events like 100% Design in London (only 33% of the selected designers have exhibited there), IMM Cologne (42%), Tokyo Design Week (58%), it succeeds in being more frequently attended by the selected designers.

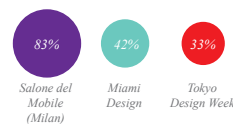
Why would such a high percentage of the designers have exhibited there, if Maison & Objects isn't even among their favourites events?

The fact that "good media coverage" is indicated as a better valued quality for a design event, is indicative of the scarce faith the designers have in design events as commercial opportunities. We have already highlighted in this issue how publications, which are most likely to be the final result of a "good media coverage", are described as of little economic relevance by the designers. Therefore the main drive for designers to take part to exhibitions and festivals, has to be researched elsewhere than just the business side of their profession.

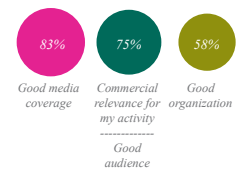
*At which design events have you exhibited?*



*At which design events do you prefer to exhibit?*



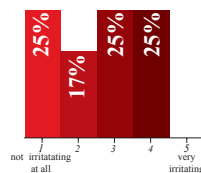
*What qualities of design events are important to you?*



Good audience

People may select more than one choice, so percentages may add up to more than 100%

*How irritating is that for you?*



# **APPENDIX II: INTERVIEWS CASE STUDY 1**

SATURDAY, 28TH APRIL 2012 - CHRIS KABEL STUDIO, ROTTERDAM

# Transcript Chris Kabel

■ visibility

■ autonomy

■ reputation

■ financial value

■ personal reward

Giovanni Innella: Chris, How would you introduce yourself briefly?

Chris Kabel: There are few versions

GI: How did you develop all these versions?

CK: I always tell to myself that I have to work on my introduction. Because when I'm at a party and somebody asks "what are you doing?" Then I say "I'm a designer", they always ask "are you a graphic designer?" and I say "No, I make products" and I say "I make lamps.." and

most of the times I get my iPhone and show them what I do and they are like "Oh nice, oh I know this one" and then suddenly it's really clear because it becomes an image that I can refer to. But if for instance you are with clients you put your self already in a place, you say

[0:00:37]

"I'm a designer and I work with this and that company; some of my objects are in collections of musea" So you put yourself in a position that they can understand, that I can refer to. But I try to refrain a little bit when I do an introduction I tell them how I work. Because I think it's easier to show the work and let the work speak for itself and I have to find the words to describe my work. But when I had the opening at Kreo last March, 2nd of March, then I asked a writer to write the text about me,

[0:01:01]

I gave her a lot of interviews and articles about myself and she then took from all these texts, freely the things she thought were most important which I think it's also a way to introduce yourself, when you have this clear story about how you work. That helped me a lot actually because she without me knowing she could put me into some sort of position that now I understand also a little bit better how I work myself.

[0:02:00]

GI: Do you need somebody from outside...

CK: To reflect on me. Yeah

GI: Do you get that when you give an interview, when you read an article about yourself do you get that perspective on you?

CK: You mean that I recognize myself?

[0:03:00]

GI: Yeah

CK: Yes. Well, it depends a bit on the quality of the interview. I was interviewed by Ivo Bonarroti for Domus. He was really enthusiastic about my work, he didn't know about my work but he did some research before he came to the interview. He made some new links between the objects that I made, which I didn't think of myself.

GI: Did he make a critique of your work?

[0:04:00]

CK: Yeah. Making connections between the work I've made that i didn't make myself, but they were very true. This gave also more direction or affirmation on what direction I'm working on.

GI: And for this project, the wood ring, what was your role in the project?

Well in short you probably know how the project came about. This building in Rotterdam which is shared by two cultural institutions Tent and Witte de With, they teamed up together because Tent is on the ground floor and Witte de With is on the second and third floor of the building and in between is an office layer. And they have one space, where they never really know what to do. It's kind of the space that leads to the space where they have the presentations and talks. So it's two spaces one big space with chairs and a stage for talks, movies or discussions and then there is this small space that leads to this bigger space, which is empty, and they don't know what to do there. Every other year they ask a designer to come up with a design for it. And this designer is most of the times based in Rotterdam. I think they want to work with the local context.

[0:06:00]

GI: And the piece then stays there?

CK: No

GI: So they are conceived for that space, but then they are meant to leave the space?

CK: Yeah, because the new assignment is then replacing the old one.

GI: When you conceived this piece, what kind of brief did you receive?

CK: Very open. They said "We have this space, we want you to think what you can do for this space as a designer. And it was about me to take out from this context whatever I liked, and also to give this space a function.

GI: So it was function driven if you had to describe it?

CK: Maybe that was my interpretation, but I could have also put some flowers. But for me it's a function driven assignment because I always work with giving things a place.

GI: Is that how this piece reflects your identity in a way?

CK: Yes, very much so. I really wanted it to be a space where people could meet, where people could wait, read, be together or alone, gather before they would enter the bigger space to go to a lecture, to have coffee. It could also be a space for vernissages or openings.

[0:08:00]

GI: What did Witte de With offered to you, in a broad sense?

[0:08:02]

CK: First in a tight sense they offered me a budget and a place or a stage. And in the broader sense, they offered me the possibility to react on a very specific situation that

[0:08:15]

I could determine myself. Maybe it's better if I talk a little bit about the project itself, because in the beginning I was much more interested in solving really concrete problems and i had a long talk with the director of Witte de With, at that time Nicholas Schaffausen, who wanted to have a coffee bar in the building. So I took that as a kind of invitation and try to figure out a way to make an interesting coffee bar, but then I thought I was just solving his problems and that was something that kept me from going even further than table and chairs. I was working with dried coffee we collected for a year and made into coating for table and chairs. Which was nice, but not that interesting. And then i thought ok but when the show is over I've made this really tailor made solution for this place, but then it will probably end up somewhere in the storage and nobody will see it again. Then I decided that I could do something that was a very good answer to that specific situation, but that afterwards it could have also entered other situations that were similar or very different. So I wanted to make an object that would function in that space but that also would be able to... it's a more strategic decision actually...

[0:10:00]

GI: Tell me a bit about this strategy

CK: The strategy was that it would have been something that would be instead of a solution,

a commodity, maybe.

[0:10:18]

That could be sold afterwards maybe through galleries, or maybe... that could just work in other situations. I just imagine that this could work very well there but I think it can work very well in a show store you know people wanting to try shoes, but it works in a school or in a reception area or in an airport.

GI: You think it's part of your profession or your ethos to think also of other contexts when you generate something?

CK: Yes. I like it a lot that you don't give very specific answers. The project that was done before was very specific for that specific situation so it was almost like an installation with cables hanging cages like chairs where you could sway around and wave from the ceiling. I didn't like that; I wanted to do something that was more independent from that situation.

GI: You mentioned the words stage and then installation. I was wondering if that's something you are trying to escape from. What does the stage represent in a design project. I understand that when you say stage that recalls other terms like visibility or spectacle. How can a project go through stages and installations and be directed towards outside, the broader context.

What is the role of a stage in a design project?

[0:12:00]

CK: In this case it was almost like a pedestal. Something that you could put your project on and people can see it. Where you can show your object to a bigger public and they also offered me the possibility to... I made a post card for it. In the beginning they proposed to me a photographer who took a very decent shot from a distance. But I thought that wasn't selling the project enough, or selling my idea enough so I took a different photo myself. And I had quite hard time to push this photo through, but it was really important to have this photo cause it so clearly express what I wanted.

GI: How come it was hard to push it through?

CK: Because they have always made the pictures that show the object in the space and this photo, which I took, I bought the camera for and I made a whole installation to make this, and I bought a lens also. But that's also part of the strategy,

[0:14:00]

of my way of thinking. I thought this is a very special object and I wanted to make the most of the possibilities that I've got. In being very precise also in the way that you present it to the outside world, which is again referring to the stage that I mentioned.

GI: Now you added also pedestal. How often does it happen to you that a project is initiated, triggered or made possible by such a mediated situation like a pedestal?

CK: Yeah. You mean institutions that offer this possibility?

GI: Not only institutions, but also companies.

CK: I have two other projects that are based on very specific questions by institutions with specific problems. One institution wants folding chairs, because they have very old folding chairs and they want me to make new folding chairs. Another institution wants a lamp which they can change their office space into a space where you can have openings or dinners.

[0:16:00]

And if they want to rent out that space of course you change tables, but by changing the light you change the space from a working space into a more festive space. I like to formulate answers to those specific situations, but they can also work in similar situations.

[0:16:24]

So I use the stages or pedestals that they offer and the specific assignment that they give to launch a product but I don't know how that would go. I don't have someone that wants to produce it afterwards.



[0:16:45]

For example with Witte de With I got a budget of 8.000€ and

[0:16:50]

I spent all of it and more even.

But now the bench is with this gallery and it sells quite good and in that way is really an investment. I need this stage to get this investment back, it's a risk that you take.

GI: Is this a strategy that you elaborated through the years? When you were young you thought in the same way?

CK: Not at all. I was completely naive then.

GI: If Witte de With would have commissioned when you were a fresh graduate what would you have done?

[0:18:00]

CK: I think I wouldn't have been able to fill that space. I think now I have more courage.

When I was in school I believed that all the projects i could have made were this big, and I really believe that during the years I dared to go bigger. But I have this thing with space, first I thug I was good only with things that I can hold in my hands. And now I noticed that I can deal with bigger projects. I gained confidence with the ability that allows you to take distance from the project and let you say "ok this can work". You have more overview

GI: Do you think it has to do with your facilities?

CK: Maybe yeah, because first you always think you have to realize yourself, but now I know there are other people that can help me solving these problems.

GI: What's the life of this object now? It has been in Witte de With...

CK: Yes

GI: It's not there anymore?

CK: No, now it's in Amsterdam in W139, an Art space. It's similar to Witte de With, they had a dance performance and the choreographer wanted to include the bench in the dance piece. It only costed me some time and money, but that doesn't matter.

[0:19:46]

I like to have it in this different context I like to see how the bench would have worked there. Because that was also the idea, you say "Ok I make for this specific situation" but then you want to see how it would function in other situations.

[0:20:00]

So I was happy to see functioning also in this kind of performance environment and I don't do it at all for publicity because that's not anymore necessary. Because I had already the goal that I wanted to reach when it was shown at gallery Kreo. But now I can experiment a little bit and see how it functions in these kinds of contexts.

GI: I'll try to tell you every context where I have seen this bench and you try to tell me what you get from the bench being in that context. So I know it has been in Witte de With, what did you get from the bench being in Witte de With?

CK: Less than I expected directly. It's not that there is somebody there that sees it and says "Hey, I want to write an article about this bench". Because the public is very different from the public that you might want to reach with this bench. Because the context is much different, it's an art context, not a design context.

GI: So Witte de With gave you the means to make the bench?

[0:21:34]

CK: Yes and also gave me the possibility to realize the bench

[0:21:35]

and to show it to other people.

GI: Of these people who do you think it was valuable to show the bench to?

[0:21:53]

CK: Didier Krzentowski from Galerie Kreo,

[0:21:58]

Journalists,

[0:22:03]

during lectures that's very important, for interviews.

[0:22:13]

I sent a postcard to Paola Antonelli for Christmas.

GI: With this picture?

CK: Yeah

GI: Did she get back to you?

CK: Indirectly yes. I have these cards, I have hundreds of them. And it's really good.

GI: I've seen this bench in Eindhoven during the Dutch Design Week.

CK: Yeah

GI: What did you get from there?

CK: I was a little bit disappointed that I didn't win in my category.

GI: What category?

CK: Free design. But that was funny, with the winner which was of course Dirk Van der Kooij, I didn't know he was participating with this 3d printed chair, I knew he was going to win.

[0:23:23]

But it was really nice because at the opening he told me "I was really nervous with your bench being also there, I thought it was going to win" Which was maybe polite, but I think it would have made a good chance.

GI: So you were there for the prize

CK: Yes. For visibility, no....

GI: I'm trying to define what it is visibility, prestige...

[0:24:00]

CK: When you make an object, it's a bit like a relationship. When you just start with a relationship there is not so much yet. There is attraction and basically that's it. And then when the attraction goes down, the newness of the object is wearing away, you need to create I think stories, situations, going to holidays together, taking it to places, don't you think so?

GI: Yeah I'm trying to get what you mean. It's like getting to know each other in a different way, discovering new things.

CK: Yes, you need to keep on pushing and putting literally the object in other situations. taking it to holidays so to say. Creating memories and keeping visibility. This is why for instance this candelabrum that I made,

[00:25:29]

the Flames candelabra, after it was taken out of production by Moooi i was really angry and frustrated because it made a lot of money and suddenly that was gone. But that was not the reason why I kept on producing it,

[00:25:34]

I kept on producing because it was a little ambassador and as long as that kept a certain visibility, it would have also reaffirm in time and time again, my status as a designer.

GI: When the object is exhibited somewhere do you re-acknowledge your profession in some ways, or re-consider your profession?

CK: In what context?

GI: Like if I take this bench in a public space, rather than the Furniture Fair or at Moma, do you rediscover your profession each time?

[0:26:00]

CK: No, but I learn more about the object I think

GI: So it's the object in the centre

CK: It shows more sides of the object. Which is not true for every object, I think. But for this one, because it's almost like a micro-architecture. It really creates a space and that's why i think it's interesting to see it in different spaces also.

GI: What about the candelabra then?

CK: That one you can see it in 100.000 ways, but it's always the same. It's not so specifics this one.

GI: Did you benefit from the visibility that your piece has gained?

[0:28:00]

CK: Like money? I think that because 2008 and 2009 were not very good years for me, I worked on a lot of projects that finally were discontinued, put a lot of Energy in there. So I had the feeling that I was almost coming to a stasis, not going up or down, but just continuing and I think this one again put me on a new level.

GI: Did it place you back on the map?

CK: A bit. Yes.

GI: What media report do you remember about this project? Or disappointed you?

CK: I had an interview with a very bad magazine where the journalist mixed up the diameter with circumference and the year of my graduation with the year of the bench so I was graduated in 2010 and I made the bench in 2001, that was really disappointing. Interviews that gave me... I think it's more the amount of interviews or that you notice that people are looking again at you and that they know your object and sometimes even if you show the object to a stranger they say "hey I know this one, I saw this one". I wanted to show you something

[0:30:00]

on a Dutch newspaper, which I have at home, and there are pictures of people in their homes, in their beds. So there is this girl sitting in her bed playing on her iPad and on the back you see my postcards just hanging there.

GI: The article is not about this.

CK: Not at all, my boyfriend said "Chris what do you see in this picture?" I said "I don't know, nothing, a girl playing with her iPad" and then I looked good and I saw this little postcard on the wall and

I kind of liked how the it permeates into the lives of the people.

[0:30:38]

GI: Is that one of your ambitions as a designer?

CK: Yeah, well no... I aim for maximum visibility... I know that there are a lot of people that are much smarter with that, but I like to think of it and play with it and sometimes work with that.

GI: Do you want to be a subject or part of the scenography?

CK: No, I don't need to be part of that role, in general also not. But I like to add certain touches that maybe change a little bit.

GI: Is that something you achieved through time, Was it the same when you started?

[0:32:00]

CK: My projects are never a lot about super spectacular things. They are quite modest most of the time. And also my statements are not that big. Like role changing or distribute better. Once I read a quote by Matali Crasset, who might not particularly favour in terms of design, but it was nice because she said "you don't have to create a revolution, but you can create an evolution". There are other designers that really want to change the world, but I don't see myself doing that. I don't think I have the capacity to do that maybe, I don't know. But I like in a modest way to have a certain influence.

GI: Does this almost ethics that you adopted affect your relationship with the media?

[0:34:00]

CK: Maybe, yes I think so. Because media really like big things and spectacular, radical statement.

GI: Also design media?

CK: Yes, but not always. It's not always true. You don't have to be Anish Kapoor to get a lot of media attention. I think that the designers that I like the most have this approach

GI: What designers do you like?

CK: Modest designers.

GI: For example?

[0:36:00]

CK: Well a lot of Italian designers from the 60'-70's onwards. I like their attitude in carefully pushing small... well actually they were quite radical for their time, but looking back now, it looks a bit more modest and that I don't know. But there are also Dutch designers that are not looking for the spectacular but that just want to continue to make things a bit better a bit more agreeable, Martin Visser was maybe one of these designers.

GI: Are there other any product than the ones I see on media and exhibitions that you have designed?

CK: You mean like anonymous objects? No. They are always sold with my name attached to it

GI: Why does that happen?

CK: Even if I would design a plug, it would be a... because that's also the time of today.

[0:37:24]

Even if Jasper Morrison makes a door handle, it's a Jasper Morrison's door handle.

[0:37:35]

If Grcic makes a ballpoint, it's Grcic ballpoint.

[0:37:46] GI: Why do you think that happens?

CK: It's a sales point. It makes money for the manufacturer.

I think that designers became so used to this way of working that they cannot or they don't want to work in another way I guess.

GI: So when a commissioner commissions Chris Kabel, what is he looking for?

CK: I had a project with a Japanese light manufacturer and they wanted to have a lamp from me. And the lamp didn't turn out right, so I suggested that they would change it, and they didn't have the budget for it, because the changes were quite radical. And I still wanted to sell this lamp, but rather without my name on it

[0:38:57] "You can sell it, it's fine, I get royalties and no problem, you have a lamp that you like" but they didn't want that. Even looking at all the investment they made, they dropped the project. Because they were like

[0:39:13] "No we want to sell a Chris Kabel project and not just anonymous project". It was not about the lamp, the lamp was good. It was just something that I wouldn't have liked to put my name on it. It's about personalities much more than about objects I think. It's quite obvious sometimes, you see objects made by designers and what's the big thing about it except that your name is embossed in the bottom of the object

[0:40:00] GI: Does it determine the commercial success of the object whether it is designed by a famous designer or not.

[0:40:15] CK: Yes

GI: Is it only about sales?

[0:40:20] CK: No, it's also about the status of the company

GI: Is there a relation of this phenomenon with the presence of designers on the media?

CK: There is also a new type of designer because of the media. Another type that is still designing, but maybe less visible because they don't fit in what the media think they should do.

GI: Going back to you, in order to be a teacher is it important to have a media profile?

[0:41:47] CK: At ECAL yes, but at DAE Masters, lead by Gijs Bakker less. Because Gijs knows personally from long time, because I was his student and he just asked me because he thought I could do it and he gave me chance and I did well and I could continue.

[0:42:00] GI: Do you think the media impacted also design education?

CK: Yeah. You see it especially with foreign schools.

[0:42:56] Like now I'm going to do a workshop together with Aldo Bakker in Sicily, Fiumara d'Arte. There it was written explicitly: two Dutch Designers with high visibility. I don't know how my visibility is, but apparently it's good enough for them. And I like that kind of thing in a way,

[0:43:18] I enjoy not so much being in the media, but the effect that it has being in the media. It opens up these kind of possibilities.

GI: Is that a skill to be prominent on the media?

CK: Yes I think so. I don't know if I have that skill, but I see that if you are good at it and very careful it really helps.

[0:44:00]

GI: What does it take to be good at it?

CK: You ask to me that I'm not good at it. I would say do your homework well. Feeding the media, having a press agent... and not feeding the media once, but feeding the media continuously in the right dosage, which it means that you have to produce work, even if you are not completely inspired. You have to continue this river of products. I cannot mention names but I see that for someone the output is also strategic, to feed continuously and keep feeding new additions to your way of designing. Continuously supply your philosophy or strategy as a designer. Adding arguments to your design philosophy

GI: You think media are able to support this sort of conversation?

[0:46:00]

CK: Yes they love it, they need it. That's how they work. They want to show new things.

GI: What is their role? Are they just a medium to give you a voice? Or are they an interlocutor for you to develop content?

[0:46:32]

CK: But don't you think that actually the media are much more about making money than anything else? There are a few that are not, which are also the most important ones

GI: They are closing... but let's say Dezeen directly publishes press releases from the designers...

CK: Yes without any critical.

GI: Is Dezeen an important tool for a designer now?

CK: Yes and no.

[0:47:15]

If you think about it there are even students' work on dezeen. And if I could give Marcus an advice It would be to take that off and be much more critical. He is not stupid, he can very well discern, but he doesn't do it and I'm actually wondering why he doesn't do that. Is it because he kind of wants to give students hope that they will also on Dezeen and that stays alive between them, but I have noticed that when you publish something on dezeen, you look on your website and it goes up for 4-5 days and then it goes medium and then back to normal level.

[0:48:00]

GI: What do you think it's in that peak?

CK: Design schools. Kids clicking

GI: For your profession what's in that click. Is there more sales?

CK: No. I hear from a lot of people that they look on Dezeen.

GI: Yes I do.

CK: Everybody does, but are you always happy with what you see.

GI: No

CK: But it's more to stay updated

GI: Yes, but it's also very pleasing. It's visually pleasing.

CK: But without your direct interest in design research, more as a designer?

GI: To me I like it because I try to see what is behind. What I like about spending sometime every day on dezeen is that I understand what is the economy behind it

CK: Yes but you are a design researcher.

GI: This is my research

CK: Yes, but can you understand why I would be interested to go in dezeen?

GI: No, I'm trying to understand that. What does it mean to you, to a fresh graduate or to Rem Koolhaas. I give you a little insight. I have number of google alerts that every weeeek I report. A dozen of names that I track, Formafantasma, Tom Dixon...

[0:50:00]

Last year FormaFantasma had a hit, their project was prominent. FormaFantasma was mentioned in that week on the web, the same amount of time than Marcel Wanders. Marcel Wanders is ubiquitous, constant. Formafantasma have peaks. At some point they shake hands for a week. They have a different economy and I try to understand what is that peak for them. Your Mesh chair has been acquired in MoMA's permanent collection. Did that have an impact on your profession?

[0:54:00]

CK: I find so hard to measure the direct impact. But I feel that it has an impact,

[0:54:20]

or at least it made me very happy when they bought it. Because I thought it would have had an impact. But direct sale like saying the sales went up by 30%, no.

GI: What about collateral activities, like do you get to do more workshops, or did you get a raise from ECAL?

[0:55:01]

CK: No, no raise. But What I noticed is that I get approached by galleries because of the purchase by MoMA and they are chasing now more.

[0:55:02]

In that way it adds credibility I think. People are more interested in you. You can notice that.

GI: Do you think it has more impact in the gallery realm or in the industry?

CK: Well in this case, this is more of a gallery piece, so it has an impact on the gallery realm. If it had been the sticky lamp for example, then it would have been more interesting for the industry.

GI: Do you think MoMA can catch the attention of the industry?

CK: Yes

[0:56:00]

GI: Is this chair appealing to the industry?

CK: No

GI: Why?

CK: It's very hard to make. It's very expensive to make it like that.

GI: Have you ever tried to talk to companies?

CK: I should have gone to EMU immediately. An Italian manufacturer. Emu does a lot of outdoor mesh furniture, similar to this. And then 3 years later it was shown in Milan. 3 years later Paola Navone comes with a chair that is exactly like this. And then she was at my studio and she said "Ohhh I love this chair, yeah... it's much more beautiful than my chair"...

GI: About the sticky lamp, that's a project that gained quite some visibility quickly.

# Transcript Mariette Dölle

■ visibility

■ autonomy

■ reputation

■ financial value

■ personal reward

Mariette Dölle: I was always in Tent, but this building houses two institutions, it houses Witte de With upstairs and Tent downstairs. Witte de With used to have a German director, Nicholas Schoffausen, and now there is a new Turkish director, Defne Ayas. She was not part of the commission for Chris, I did it together with Nicholas.

[...]

Giovanni Innella: Could you briefly introduce yourself?

MD: I'm Mariette Dölle, I'm the artistic director of Tent, exhibition space in the heart of Rotterdam. We are based in the Witte de With street 50, and it's a former school building. On the ground floor it's Tent, we show mainly Rotterdam based art, what's happening in Rotterdam, and on the second and third floor this building houses Witte de With contemporary art space that looks towards the international art scene. So local and international art is connected in this building by two exhibition spaces.

GI: And your background is...

MD: I'm an art historian, trained as such.

GI: So in this project, the Wood Ring by Chris Kabel, what was your role?

MD: The role was actually was... 6 years ago when I started working here, I was interested in the fact that we are two institutions in the building and there is hardly any connection between us. Physically there is, because when people go up the stairs, come to the first floor, which is the office floor, then they have to go one stair more and go to the exhibition space of Witte de With, and in this in between floor, there is a space, that is in a way "nothing". It is not an exhibition space, it is not an alley, it is not the space of Witte de With and it is not the space of Tent. So for us, it's a space that poses us many questions. The first question was: "What am I?" Myself together with the director of Witte de With Nicholas Schaffausen, decided that we would have liked to start what we call a research project titled "Shared space", in which we would ask others, to tell us what the space was or was about.

GI: When did you start this?

MD: It would be nice to know it by heart, but let's say a few years ago. Because Chris' is the third project we did in that space. So to continue a little bit on the commission of Chris: when we started with this Shared Space project, we felt that for Tent and Witte de With, it would have been interesting, not to commission visual artists – our core business we always show in our exhibition spaces –, but to branch out a little and to look at the great community of designers that are based in Rotterdam. We were also interested in not working on exhibition concepts, because that's what we do on a daily basis in our spaces, but to work on a concept that it is not about display, but it's about use: use of space, use of objects, use of furniture. This led to a question that I understood is quite puzzling to designers; in each episode we asked designers: "could you come up with a total concept about the space, its use, its audience, its design?" One of the first designers we invited was Bertjan Pot, who is a quite well known Dutch designer, and in the first discussions we had with the designers the first question was: "What is the problem that I have to solve for you?" So from this I understood, coming from the background of visual arts and exhibitions, that when a designer is commissioned to do something, there should be a problem that he or she needs to solve or tackle or appose. Nicholas and I were more or less saying: "well this is the



space, tell us something about the space. Do something". That was the initial conversation. So in the initial conversation, there was also this almost uncomfortable moment, we are two art curators, with a complete blank canvas. Artists love blank canvases, and a designer that wants to change, make things better, improve, solve. It was always a great moment in our initial conversations.

GI: Have you learned how to have that conversation with designers, through the years?

MD: Not at all! Through the years I think, I stuck to the principle of blank canvas. Saying to the designers: "Help! Save us! I don't know anything" Because I almost believe in this confusion between the genres, but also I consider this commission a form of fundamental research. It's a research invitation to the designer in which do not know the outcome yet. So there is not an outcome that is good or that is bad, there is an outcome. And this research is important to me because I believe is one of the core activities for the creative industry.

GI: Tell me about the creative industry. Have you ever witnessed any conflict or competition between designers and the artists?

MD: Yes! It's always there. And I say this from a distance, because obviously I'm not an artist and I'm not a designer, but I have in my exhibition practice, made a number of shows in which I have either mixed artists or for instance invited designers to show their art. Because there are many designers... last time I had this show called Shared Value, which was about the economical turn in the Netherlands for subsidies concerns, because in former times you could say that visual artists were the gods of the art world because the freest, the most experimental, the most fundamental in the visual research,

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however if you look at the government and the larger subsidies organs,

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the creative designers they are now the gods of the creative world. Because they understand as far as government is concerned, how their creative products can be made suitable for a market; how their creative products find an audience, whereas the artists is considered unable to find his audience and unable to earn money with finding an audience. So if you put the creative designer as the leader of the art world then that's a different take on what design is. You no longer look at designers as also very creative and very independent form of research, but you consider them much more supply and demand oriented creativity. I think this is a slight misconception, however if you look at artists and designers, this misconception is quite often there. When I programmed my exhibition in which I invited a number of designers, fashion designer, Marchel Raymonds [uncomprehensible], graphic designer, 75b, and product designer Bertjan Pot, I asked them to only show their fundamental research thinking. So the things that they were making in their studios, or which they were not sure whether it would have become an object or a sellable thing, or whatever. And this stage that is very open and experimental, before you know what it will become, relates very much to visual art principles, and the way visual artists work. However if you look at it from a visual art perspective, and the visual art ranking, it doesn't play a big role let's say in a gallery system, or an art biennale, so those worlds are quite apart.

GI: I was wondering, coming from a design background, here in the Netherlands there are many design events like the Dutch Design Week, or Objects Rotterdam... what differences you witness between the art and design fairs?

MD: I'm interested in those phenomena, if you look at the art fair system you have a very clear ranking: art Basel, if you are at art Basel, you know you have arrived, that's the best art fair in the world, and you have Freeze, then you have this going back and forth ranking, it's a bit like a soccer competition I think.

Salone del Mobile of course for the design fair system, if you look at how design fairs are ranked, it is quite difficult. And I think that this design fair principle, tries to mimic the art design principle, also in this idea of making small editions of design objects. The Wooden Ring by Chris Kabel it's almost like an art edition, I think it's ten. Really mimicking the art principle. Nevertheless design fairs have not really blossomed that much as the art fairs

yet, especially in the Netherlands. For example Object Rotterdam, is not necessarily the most successful fair to sell your design objects. And I know that for instance one of the best known design galleries in the Netherlands, VIVID, based in Rotterdam, would rather present their designers at the Art fairs. Trying to get into this system of art prices, small editions, selling them as if they were sculptures.

GI: What about the media, are you familiar with design magazines vs art magazines?

MD: Of course I'm not completely aware of it, I must say. There is design theory and there is art theory and never the two should meet, I must say... So there is still this gap looking at design and looking at art... it would be great if I knew why that there is... but I don't. It's actually funny, in the Netherlands both chief editors of the magazines for art and design – Metropolis M and Items – they look very much alike. They are both very tall, very thin and have glasses. It's amazing, actually they could switch and I would love it if they do for one issue and see what would happen.

GI: I'd like to take you through some reflections through this object. I assume that this object ended up much more on design magazines, than art magazines...

MD: Definitely

GI: What does that mean for Witte de With?

MD: For Witte de With and Tent, that is totally fine. Because what we are looking for is to challenge ourselves, because originally we are art institutions, so our interest in design comes from a conceptual perspective and our interest in what happens in the design commissions we gave here, it's quite open. I think Chris' design was the third episode and it was the most of an object, a singular object that displayed itself in the space. For instance before Chris there was another designer, Sebastian Straatsma who completely redesigned the space, so there the space did not become a commodity, it became an environment in which you could be, but it's not a commodity you can sell. In Chris' case, it is this one singular object, a statement I would say that does transform the space in a social space, but it can travel anywhere. It is in a way a universal work, where the episode before it was a local work, it was in that space, it changed that space and it disappeared.

GI: Also talking with Chris we were considering that this object is now travelling, it's having a life on its own. For Witte de With does that mean anything that this object has been presented at the Dutch Design Week, Galerie Kreo... does it give any benefit to Witte de With in a broad sense?

MD: I think it gives Tent and Witte de With a benefit, in the sense that we are able to commission a work that became quite a crucial work for Chris Kabel. So we were at the right time, right place. It was the right moment. I don't know if Chris told you, but when we commissioned him, when we invited him for the space. I think it took him two or three other concepts to finally end up with this. The concept of the Wooden Bench I think in the beginning, it was like it obeyed too much to our wishes... so in the beginning he had all concepts, making a bar, doing something with coffee, tables, seats, blabla... it was almost baroque, and working on it, all of the sudden he came with this radical, minimalistic concept of the wooden ring. That was perfect. I think this wooden ring was in his head already for ages, but obeying to our wishes and our demands, blurred his vision until he finally as a true artist in his own right, decided "Fuck the commission, this is what I'm going to make, this is what I want to propose. Take it or leave it".

GI: So how much autonomy you gave him?

MD: Well, what do you think? I think we gave them 150% autonomy. To everything we said OK.

Also in the freedom to make it a universal work and travel with it and sell it, without us

receiving any commission or whatever.

GI: So you are outside the trading?

[0:22:40]

MD: Yes, we invested in the project and it's all going to Chris, which is also a form of support and belief in designers.

GI: Instead when the image is published or the piece is exhibited, do you have any agreement on the crediting?

[0:23:16]

MD: Not particularly. All we say is please credit us as commissioners.

GI: But there isn't an agreement?

MD: Not a very big agreement. It's on a modest level.

GI: How did you choose Chris?

MD: Chris is the third commission, and we were interested in inviting designer that to us contest many of the laws of the art world, so that kind of plays with that. And by law I don't mind contracts or whatever, but this idea of how when does an object become a sculpture, when does the sculpture becomes an object; how do we deal with things like edition, why is Chris Kabel is a designer and not an artist? There is a number of designers that really work in an autonomous way, in a research based way, condensing this research into objects, which we haven't seen before. Especially in Chris' case, Chris is almost like a surgeon, he dissects notions of function, form, and materials, brings them together in a new constellation so the sentence Form Follows Function doesn't count anymore. And I think that's a very interesting conceptual way to look at design. So he was very high in our list, so of course we went for him.

GI: What happened to the piece? Who owns the pieces?

MD: Chris

GI: What did you offer to him in a broader sense?

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MD: On a practical sense we offered a space and a budget and practical support.

[0:26:11]

Hopefully from the image perspective, we offered him the support of two well-known institutions.

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Tent very well known in the Netherlands, Witte de With is known internationally, so you could say that in a way, if those institutions commission a work by Chris, it says

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he has been approved by interesting institutions for the art world, so it offers him a positive note in his curriculum and I also believe that

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when a work has been on display in an art space

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especially of course as renowned as Witte de With, this assures a collector, a design collector, that the piece has financial value in an art or design context. Because it has been displayed, respected curators have approved the work.

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You offer image that can be translated in financial value.

[0:27:44] [0:27:44]

It's the principle that is very well-known in the art world. If your work is displayed at MoMA for example,

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or if your gallery has an art exhibition, your work can be worth more.

GI: This is something we are trying to understand.

MD: Since a number of years it's entering a lot of course, and there is a number of designers that really work in that area. Of course you have other areas, like industrial design where you have these chairs, industrial design but classic and made in extreme abundance.

GI: Do you remember any particular media report about this bench?

MD: There were, but I don't remember at the moment. We were talking about this ranking system... and it's interesting that since 6-7 years you have art-designers who indeed are part of a global group of designers who sells to collectors, on fairs, in design galleries... a whole system that enables them to make a much more radical design that also has a system of haute-couture, haute-design... it's surprising that in fashion it exists since ages and in art... but it took so long for design to adopt this system. I think it's beneficial not only from a financial point of view for designers, it also makes design really interesting, because all of the sudden it becomes a radical realm, sometimes it also enter this commodity system, the over-luxury items system.

GI: Do you think that this can also be a limit for design?

MD: We don't know... it fascinates a lot of people, because it's the art-designer phenomenon, it has been written about it extensively, there have been many symposia, many arguments between artists and designers. Stupid designers now earn tons of money because they make two benches instead of millions. In Rotterdam we have a great artists: Joep van Lishout, who also plays with this all the time. He either starts making furniture and limited editions and then smaller editions, so it is a confusing and exciting system. It is an issue that because is so new, so young, compared to the art age system that we don't know where it is going. But luckily we have you...

GI: Chris is in between art and design. If you talk to him as a designer he would tell you all his ambitions to work with the industry... Why do you think the industry is not sensitive to these contexts? Do you think the industry will ever pick it, understand its value.

MD: I think the industry would understand the value, but it's also the decision of Chris to say would I like to have this as an industrial object and obviously he doesn't. It's about where you want to be as a designer. If I was a designer I would have liked to design these evergreen. Bertjan Pot has made this lamp and it's an evergreen. So when I walk to New York and I see a Bertjan Pot, I come back from Moscow and I see a freaking Bertjan Pot too. For me I would love that world domination as a designer, but you could say that Chris is not interested in this world domination.

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He is interested in this almost interpersonal relation between these objects and the users, commissioner, buyer, collector. And I think there is also a beauty in that. Almost that means that if he would do an edition of ten or so Wooden Rings, that means that he would know all the ten people that own it, and there is also a beauty in that.

GI: Going back to the way this bench is consumed, do you think that consuming the bench as an image is also a form of consumption?

MD: Yes definitely.

GI: Do you think it's part of the design or just a consequence?

[0:34:58]

MD: No, it's part of the design. I can say it firmly. I'll show you why, because this image (the postcard), it's what we would say an iconic image. When we were working on the commission and the bench was installed, Tent and Witte de With always make postcards for the audience to take away to their home and think again of the beautiful space you visited, that's also an idea of distribution of design. So I had my photographer and my photographer took a number of pictures of the space and how the bench was used in the

space. These pictures were not approved by the artists. I think what I wanted to show was context, I wanted to show the space of Tent and Witte de With in a recognizable way, I wanted to show how the bench was fitted in the context. But what Chris was interested in was framing; how to show the iconic quality of the Wooden Ring, and the only way to show the iconic quality of the wooden ring is to make an image from a point of view that we will never have. Because we, you and I, will never be able to see the perfect circle, because we are standing in front of it and we are not climbing on a ladder and looking at it from above. So it's very interesting that to bring across these iconic quality of a tree in a perfect circle, he made and distributed a picture that is in a way a non-realistic picture. Therefore this is not a documentary picture, but it's about framing and indeed this is to me part of the design.

GI: Do Tent and Witte de With use this image?

MD: Yes, that's our postcard that we send out, also this became our communication picture. I think it's very interesting that since this is such an iconic picture, it has been so much thought why this picture has to be this particular picture; to me it's also interesting who is on the bench and what is she reading? Because we can actually see what she is reading and it looks to me a little bit like the drafts of the wooden parts that are put together, but I'm not sure. This I would like to know, cause I never asked Chris. So the picture is a part of the concept, definitely.

GI: You think this object can receive a critique from an artistic perspective?

MD: Yes and no, because in a way it's extremely Dutch design. When you see it for real, it's actually a quite unspectacular ring. But if you look at it closer and you understand how it's made from one tree, it is an extremely spectacular thing. So there is this communication between the thing and the way it came about. What we are looking for when we look at it from an art perspective, it's how it tells us something about the world around us. How in a way it also contests our views about the world around us, and there I still have to think. I like it, in a way it relates to minimalists sculpture obviously, but I would have to think on how I would insert it in an exhibition.

GI: Sometimes it feels a bit like some work of Penone...

MD: Yeah, a million per cent. But Penone would never do this, he is also about nature and adjusting nature a little and manipulating it a little, but always in awe in nature, this is tamed nature...

GI: Do you think Tent and Witte de With would benefit from the circulation of this project?

MD: Yes, definitely. It's an amazing project.

GI: In what ways would they benefit from it?

MD: We would benefit from it because we showed that we are brave enough to commission something what we were commissioning. We really told him "Tell us your vision, don't solve any problem, don't make anything better. Tell us what you want to do". So this is the pure unplugged Chris Kabel, unfiltered. There is no commission that says it has to be a tree, there is no commission that says it has to be this and that big...

GI: In an economic sense?

MD: No benefit what so ever.

GI: Do you not count the publications you had?

MD: Yeah we do, but if you look at it from an economic perspective, it would have been great if we had asked a percentage each time one of the editions would have been sold. But you know on the other hand we are also here to support great artists or great designers, so it's also an investment in his development, career...

GI: I find stunning that you commission designers without a commercial strategy behind it.

MD: Yes, no commercial strategy. But we are not a commercial space and also we don't want to compete with a commercial spaces, because then an all other system come into play. Also, that would imply that maybe we would make different choices, we would be looking at the bestseller designer so to ensure our revenue. We are more interested in their practice and what that means. Up to this point that's our core business.

GI: You seem much more naïve than other chats I'm having

MD: That's a good complement.

GI: It doesn't make any difference if it's published on Items or not?

MD: It would be great. But the first thing is if it becomes an exciting project. We are sure that if it's an exciting project it will distribute itself into the world at large. If you compare it to a museum that also have no commercial objective when commissioning a project...

GI: It comes down to how many visitors and publications you have...

MD: Yeah but I can't imagine we would do something to get more audience. I do believe that if we have a great program, of course we are happy to have more audience, also when we have a great designer like Chris with an amazing project we go out of our way to let people know, to let the press know, to let our audience know. In that sense I believe we have been successful because within few weeks the Wooden Ring became quite well known. But this naivety I think it's a strong drive for this Shared space project.

GI: But then you don't want the project to stay?

MD: It's always fundamental research, so we move on.

GI: In terms of PR, you said that this object has circulated a lot, thanks to your PR activity...

MD: And thanks to the project

GI: What about the PR activity of Chris Kabel. Did it ever happen that you send the same press release to the same people?

MD: No. In that we worked very well together, in the sense that we completely know who sends what and to whom. It has been one of the most successful episode and I think it has to do with the fact that it's a project that can be transported to other places. Whereas the previous episodes where environment and after that it was gone. This is a Universalist approach.

GI: Do you know if the object has been acquired by other museums?

MD: I think so, you should ask Chris...

GI: What would that mean for Witte de With?

MD: That would be great. In the beginning the Boijman museum was completely enthusiastic about the piece and was considering acquiring it. Since Witte de With and Tend do not have a collection, it would be great and a beautiful story. The work commissioned by two Rotterdam based institutions to a Rotterdam based designer and then it becomes part of the Rotterdam art history or cultural history by acquiring it. But I think that didn't happen.

# **APPENDIX III: INTERVIEWS CASE STUDY 2**

THURSDAY, 19TH APRIL 2012 - HOTEL IBIS MILAN

# Transcript Mischer'traxler

■ visibility

■ autonomy

■ reputation

■ financial value

■ personal reward

Giovanni Innella: How would you introduce yourself?

Thomas Traxler: I'm Thomas and that's Katharina, we are both from Studio Mischer'Traxler, we founded it in 2009 and we are based in Vienna

GI: If you have to label the studio Mischer'Traxler how would you label it?

Katharina Mischer: That's still our big problem; we can't put it into a sentence. We don't want to put in a box and try to be as versatile as possible. So we do from products, objects, to installations, to machines, to production cycles, to systems.

GI: You still call it design?

KM: Yes, we actually just call it design cause it's easier to have one big word rather than little words describing something.

GI: And in this specific project what was your role?

TT: Actually in this project we were really just the designers. I think it was one of the first times that we were just the designers and not building it. So it was weird in a way. We are not used to it, because we didn't have control for the final thing,

KM: so it was strange because on the way we still develop things, during the process you always develop. And there we couldn't really see how the development was going on. We had to face the first prototype and see the problems and react then to that, apply the changes to the next one. It was different.

GI: So what did you deliver?

[0:04:00]

TT: Autocad drawings. All the separated pieces, how many pieces of each kind. It's around 50 different kind of pieces. We gave him all those layers and how to build it, how to join it together.

KM: They are all custom made, all together they are 650 pieces, of 50 different kinds. Once he got all the pieces it was like in lego, we did like instructions to build it layer by layer

GI: How was the commissioner involved in this communication?

TT: We were only in contact with Pascale from the gallery, so we send the plans to both, but at the same time always discussing with the craftsman. Partially she was directly at the workshop, or we would talk via skype and she would call him in Arabic straightaway. But the craftsman speaks English, if we would have known he speaks really good English, it would have been easier.

KM: It was difficult being so far away, not being able to pop by and have a look, see if there is any problem.

GI: It was the first time to work on remote?

TT: Yes

GI: So you mentioned the commissioner and the craftsman, who else was involved?

KM: The two gallerists. One is based in Europe, Milan and Pascale is based in Beirut. Their



background is architecture, but decided that they wanted to work on middle-eastern culture and craftsmanship and pair the designers in order to move it on, to push it. So they asked us and they established the connection with various craftsmen in Lebanon, in order to give tasks basically. So it was them involved, then they have a press office in Milan, they have another studio in Istanbul doing set up design for both the exhibition in Dubai and the one in Milan.

[0:08:00]

TT: In a way also Cyril Zammit, he is like the founder of Dubai Design Days.

KM: Since last year he was discussing whether we would come to Design Days Dubai for something and he always wanted new projects and we can't do just new projects all the time and then he somehow found out that are working with Carwan on a new project and he wanted a performance by us in the space of Carwan. That was like a month before Dubai.

T Nicolas from the galley called us "you want to go to Dubai? Everything is arranged already. You have a flight, you stay in a hotel, you have got a space. We want you to go there"

GI: So finally you went there?

KM: Yes. For this gallery, but the performance part was more like that the gallery presented Mischer'Traxler.

GI: Did you have to make something?

KM: Yes we built it together with him. This picture was take in Dubai

GI: But you are not in the picture

KM: Because I took it. In the beginning we had all 650 pieces on the wall lined up, telling the all story. How the pieces are made from rectangular to lathe little pieces. Everyday we were building a bit, but of course it was more like a show thing, cause we didn't use the glue, otherwise we couldn't take it back home and building up would have required machinery which we didn't have. Everything was a bit of a show.

GI: Was there a finished piece as well?

KM: Yes, at the gallery space

TT: but that was a bit on the next row.

[0:10:00]

GI: So this is the only project you didn't build yourself, but then you ended up building it as a performance.

TT: A little bit, yeah. At least we could really understand that he was swearing

GI: Was it stressful?

KM: Yes, because two weeks before Dubai the piece didn't turn out well, and we figured out the problem and he had to restart all over and do it in one week, in order to bring it on time to Dubai, so he needed to bring it into pieces and everything was a bit messy.

GI: How did you get to know about the commissioner?

TT: We were actually in Basel and then there was this kind of talk and after the talk we went and Nicola came "Hi, hello blah blah blah, I'm Nicola from Carwan gallery, nice to meet you" and then we talked a bit for 2-3 minutes, it was really quick and then we went to Berlin in October because the gallery from Vienna presented us in Berlin at those kind of gallery walks.

GI: Was it DMY?

TT: No it was Qubique, it's a new fair that started in October

GI: Is it for collector?

KM: No it's really like a fair, with a lot of brands showing work. It's a bit like Cologne

[0:12:00]

GI: Maybe a bit like the official fair here?

KM: Yeah, but then trying to be Berlinish, but it's not. It was too fake.

[0:12:12]

TT: And then they had Helmrinderknecht, he organized the gallery walk. So Carvell was there and we met again.

KM: Yes but before that they actually called us to ask whether we would have liked working on a project. I think they called us in October, or even September. Whether we would have been interested.

GI: That's after Basel?

KM: After Basel, in September/October they called us whether we would be interested to work with them as they were building up their schedule for the next season. We were like "well of course we would be interested" and then we met in Berlin and discussed a bit and then we started discussing the project together. Then it was October and by December we needed to have the idea.

TT: The proposals and then it was always back and forth. We sent them two proposals, they chose that one and then we developed it properly, then we sent them the drawings and they went to the craftsmen. The craftsman basically said it was much more expensive.

KM: In the beginning we had 1700 pieces. It was really not affordable, so we didn't want to make it smaller in size. It's still a big piece, so we had to work on how to reduce the amount of parts, so that the assembly it's easier.

TT: It also got smaller

[0:14:00]

KM: It got half of the size, not half the size, but two third of the size. The length could have been shorter. We managed to reduce the pieces to 650pieces And after the first piece was made a few more elements were added as it lost a bit of stability

GI: Could you choose the craftsman?

KM: No, well I think we could have said we don't want to work with Marsharabilia, but it sounded really interesting even though it was hard to research. We really tried to find out the history, how it's made, in internet if you google it in English or german, it just doesn't exist and I think in Arabian it would, but we don't have a keyboard and even in Wikipedia where you can change a language, it doesn't show more.

TT: But they were actually helpful. They sent us links from Arabic pages, they sent us a list which could be useful to find something because we told them that we couldn't get any information.

GI: You couldn't visit the craftsman?

[0:16:00]

KM: Unfortunately not. That was a pity, I think it would have had an impact on the project, but not necessarily a better one. Because the naivity it had in the project, and this not being connected with the place and the background, I think it was helpful for the project to be a bit disconnected and really have a fresh view on it. That was successful for us as thinkers. And we didn't want to destroy the background of the story, the original impact, but we had a fresh view. Which was good.

TT: We never had restrictions. If we would have talked to the craftsmen probably it would have been like "No, you can't do that!"

KM: For them it was the first time they did it in 3D. They had never built something like this. Normally they don't use glue, they just get stuck and then it's a fixed frame, because the frame is fixed, the pieces don't move. And now it was the first time for them and in the

region to go in 3d and his father who runs the workshop since 40 years was like “You can’t do it in 3d, you don’t!”, It’s not meant to be like that.

GI: Did you know about the commissioner before?

[0:18:00]

TT: Yes we knew it because last year they showed in Lambrate and we had seen the show. We looked at the show.

[0:18:45]

And also we met Philippe Malouin in Vienna, cause he did a project there, so we asked him about them, how they are. Because last commission was not so good. So we asked him how they are and how it is working with them.

KM: And we started being more confident about our feelings whether we like someone or not. It’s important, if it feels like it won’t go well, because you just don’t come along well. This is a learning process for us. If you meet with somebody and then you meet and don’t feel like it will go well, you just shouldn’t do it.

[0:20:00]

GI: Why did you accept this commission?

TT: For me the project sounded interesting. They had a real structure, so they also said to us what they wanted to make, they wanted to pair international designers with local craftsmen and

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they wanted to connect in some ways to university to get the students in, but then that didn’t work out that well, because they weren’t really engaged enough apparently. But it was the all project description, they had really a good plan.

KM: It wasn’t “do you want to make something?”, they really had a plan, they had a concept, they had deadlines, they knew to whom they would ask.

GI: Was Dubai and the furniture fair in the plan?

KM: Yes, Dubai was in the plan, and... well everything was evolving, but they had certain steps that they would like to bring the project to, so they had it on a list

[0:21:08]

“we would like to show there, there and there... these are the designers involved, and we would like you in because it’s an international context...” they had a plan and a vision, why they do, how they do it, how they would come there. And sometimes we talk to people and they are like “let’s just do something” and maybe they’ll like it or not. Here it wasn’t whether they like it or not, it was about developing it together and that was a good point for working with them. They had a plan and idea.

TT: They were also like nice.

GI: You think the commission reflected in some way your identity, or it could have been proposed to anyone?

[0:22:00]

KM: I think it could have been proposed to anyone.

TT: I’m not so sure.

KM: In Austria there is still a lot of craftsmanship that is still going on, so we have a connection with craftsmanship and what it means to a country, that’s good to have that background, but they didn’t know.

TT: I think you want to know if the project could have been proposed to another gallery as well...

GI: No, I wanted to know if they shaped the commission around you or not

KM: We gave them our portfolio which tell our story, why we do things and how we do things. They approached us telling us they like the way we think and we are doing. And I think they tried to have various positions of designers, some more into shaping very nicely and good and some with more of a storyline, and... they wanted to have a range of designers that have a different paths, and so we fitted one niche

[0:24:00]

GI: Could you see a red thread that connects all the designers?

KM: No, I think sometimes is like an intelligence test, that you have fruits and everything is fruit and if there is a vegetable is wrong, but if you have anything from a room it's already ok again. So there is no thread at all. The designers were all different in their background, their expertise... but unfortunately we have never met all of the designers. We don't know all of them personally.

GI: While designing, did you adapt your project to the identity of the commissioner?

TT: No, actually we didn't adapt it.

KM: It fitted automatically because we had this context of the Marsharabilia, which was already Middle-eastern. So it already fit in the gallery concept and their range, cause it automatically had this feel and look. I assume if it would have been another gallery that doesn't have this regional context, I think we would have been more careful in choosing colours and materials. But there it happened automatically that it would fit their range.

They had a good frame that automatically would fit.

TT: That was really nice

[0:26:00]

KM: We wanted to introduce colour, we wanted to make it greyish, which would have been fine as they have this monochrome range, but we never thought of colour as doing it in pink or orange or... cause it would have not fit the region and the gallery visually

TT: but also not the craft. We didn't want to make it completely new and modernize it. At the end the structure is really traditional, we designed the shape of the single pieces, but we wanted to have it simple but still that has the feeling that is already done in this way. We didn't want to put too much of Austria, of European identity on the piece. Because it was about it being recognizable that it's not a green thing in a grey surrounding.

GI: What part of the project is really mischer'traxler?

KM: The way we approached the project and the story the piece tells. When we look at the piece we are still not used to it, cause it feels a bit different. But then we know how we did and feel it's right in the context, with the craft and everything it feels so right. But looking at it in the end "it's really our name underneath?" It's really a bit strange. But it fits if you know the context, the story behind, and I assume that's the important part to us.

[0:28:00]

They gave us a good brief, even if we would have got the tile craft, I was thinking what we would have done, what colours we would have used, it would have been Arabic, sandy colours, which would have fit in their range. So they have a good brief, they would have a nice show automatically.

GI: Is it hard to receive good briefs?

TT: This was one of the few good briefs we had.

[0:28:58]

The most challenging brief was the one for Drawing Time, we even met in Milan to talk to the guy from the company and at then end the briefing was something like "do something that represents the company and I really like to talk about it". We thought we were screwed.

KM: It was somehow a nice briefing as well, but it was so open.

TT: It was so difficult, he is really a nice guy, we really like him. We didn't want to disappoint him.

GI: What do you think of the W Hotels brief?

KM: It was not a brief. It was like taking a word and building something around it. I wouldn't call it a brief.

[0:30:00]

TT: It was a kind of briefing in the sense that it said "conversation pieces" and the aim was to bring strangers together, in order to talk to each other... but on the other hand it was more

like foamy, bubbly,

[0:30:16]

and in the end it was so open that one could have done whatever they wanted. But that's also because they asked designers coming from different backgrounds and they wanted to give them the freedom, so that anyone can represent themselves.

KM: because it's about the studio

TT: So they couldn't really narrow it down, because otherwise it would have been like Carwan gallery show where everything fits together. Instead it should have been about the individual studios

GI: In this case you knew it had to be a piece of furniture, or it could have been anything?

[0:31:09]

KM: I think it was clear that they would have liked something for interior use

TT: and also something that can sell

KM: they gave us a list of what they already have, so it was clear it would have been good if we don't make a second product. But if the idea would have been great that we show two paravans, it would have been fine.

[0:32:00]

The most difficult brief is something like "make a table" or "make a chair". We wouldn't know how to start. The story would be nice if something tells you "the first time you move in a flat, the first thing you need is a table". Such story would be more of a starting point than just "make a table". Or if you talk about getting together, sharing a meal, how do you eat. Then maybe it's not a table, it's a carpet. I don't know.

GI: Maybe a narration is what helps?

KM: We are more the story types. And then the project evolves automatically, thing happen the way they have to be.

TT: If we don't have these kind of deadlines then we sit down and make out own guidelines.

GI: What did you offer to the commissioner in a broader sense?

[0:34:00]

TT: I think in a way we gave them the starting point for a bigger project. So this concept can be developed to various things. As we worked together for the first time we also got along.

GI: You feel you established a relationship?

TT: Actually yes.

KM: If things go well and they manage to sell pieces, I could imagine that we use the same principle of using Marsharabilia for other pieces and if they want to do another project and work together we would again work with them.

TT: For now we gave them a good experience. We really worked hard on it. It wasn't really easy.

KM: I feel like they are happy because it represents the gallery well in a way. What difference it can make if you use a designer that comes from somewhere, something new is gonna happen that fits the region, fits the gallery, but it also represents it somewhere else. I think they were happy with a result that tells the story of who they are, what the concept of the gallery is, because they really have a strong concept and the piece tells the story quite well, or it seems so.

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Because they were approached by... They established a good relationship with Brownbook, because it was a good thing for Brownbook to write about Marsharabilia, at the same time it was good for the gallery because it tells the story of the background, I feel like it's a project you could easily communicate with.

[0:36:00]

The table stands for many layers of things you could use for communication.

GI: What media reports you remember about this project? This project is relatively young, so media reports will probably come, but so far what media reports do you remember?

[0:36:31]

KM: Well, beforehand there was during Design Days Dubai there was a media report in it.

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And then a TV team filmed Roger, the craftsman, telling something in Arabic so we don't know, but it was funny to watch.

[0:36:54]

TT: Now Abitare was here to film it actually.

GI: Which of these media report you value the most?

[0:37:34]

TT: I think this publication is nice (the one from the gallery and Brownbook), even though there is never a finished piece in it. Which is strange, because there is also another artist in it and they are showing the finished thing, so it feels a bit awkward.

KM: You can see pieces but not a finished one, which is a bit strange.

[0:38:00]

GI: In general, of your past projects do you remember anything that you are particularly happy with or proud of?

KM: Last year there was a big abitare article, 6 pages long about the studio.

GI: What did you appreciate of that?

KM: It had a certain depth; it was about how we work and not about one project in particular. Which is always nice. There was a Frame article and that was also about us and various projects and approaches. We prefer if it's somehow not about one piece, but more the overall way of how we work. Maybe we are afraid that one project alone doesn't tell what we are interested in.

GI: Do you know what will happen to the pieces? How many pieces are we talking about?

TT: 10 pieces + 2 artist's proofs

GI: They still have to be made?

[0:40:00]

TT: One was made for Dubai and it was sold in Dubai. And I think it was an artist proof somehow, because it wasn't really perfect yet. But this one we don't know. They plan to auction one.

GI: What kind of life your pieces have?

TT: Actually they have more life than we have, they travel more than we, they sleep more. The Idea of a Tree objects they are going quite... partly the machine, but it's very expensive to show, even for museums budget wise it's really expensive to show, it's heavy it's bulky, it's big and if it has to function we have to go there to run it, so everything piles up in the budget so often we show with a video and objects.

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So we have a kind of objects pool and from there we send to exhibitions, but if we sell one of those it's fine. And if we need more, we produce them.

GI: Is selling still a priority? Would you refuse a sale for keeping the object travelling instead?

KM: It's never the same piece again, but similar, it still tells the project in a good way.  
T Selling is not the main priority, but it's an important priority cause it brings money. We also think it's good when things ends up in real life and not just in exhibitions and museums. When you know that people is using it.

[0:43:03]

Even though we have sold one to a couple in Vienna in January, and they also came when

[0:44:00] it was produced, they wanted to have something that it's not too expensive but they also wanted gradients, so it should be a sunny day so we were preparing everything and looking at the weather forecasting and then calling them saying "what about tomorrow?" So they came and they looked at it, we sat together, we had a coffee and everything, then we finished it and gave it to them.

So now it's in their living room and then we got an email saying "you know actually we talked to others and the supports would also be nice round or smaller or invisible because actually it's a piece to look at and not to use it". They are not collectors, they are normal people, interested in design, they just appreciate the piece, not collectors. They are interested in art and design, but not to such an extent and they have a little normal flat, really normal. We were happy our piece would have ended up in a real life in a way, but then they said it's more to look at than use it.

GI: Does loaning pieces play a role in your economy?

KM: Yeah, cause it makes the project travel, it makes people see it and then probably a gallery wants to spread pieces. It spreads the word that it exists, without us doing so much.

GI: Do you ask for money when giving pieces on loan?

[0:46:00] KM: We never ask for money for loans. Just the expenses.

TT: Now we are doing for the first time an exhibition in which we have a budget in Vienna. Each designer gets a fee, but then they have to cover all the transportation and then if it's produced we have to cover all those things. So at the end it's even. It's fair

[0:46:28] KM: I feel like in design it's more difficult than ask for a fee than in art.

We sometimes meet media artists, for example – because by showing the machine we end up in media festivals sometimes – they always ask for a fee when going to show a work for 2-3 days. We only realize now we can ask for a fee. In art they are willing to pay, in design they are not, it's really strange. It really feels like design and art somehow works differently, although it's the same contexts. Like if it's a museum is apparently the same client but they would treat the design and the artist differently. Maybe it's just our impression. Probably because we never ask, now we are learning to ask.

[0:48:00]

We should ask for some sort of administration, packing fee. Because packing is work, it's manually work, it's heavy and logistically. We should start asking for an administration fee, because it's a lot of work involved.

GI: Do you benefit from visibility and in what way?

KM: it piles up, sometimes you meet somebody and you introduce yourself and you start mentioning the past projects. And they say "Oh yes I've seen that one, you are those!" Suddenly they recognize who you are, not just the project you are standing in front of, but they realize they had seen your things, and they get happy because they recognize something. I think it's about being recognized in a way.

[0:50:00] TT: I think that when you talk to people and then they can relate to something it's a lot easier to talk to them, I don't know if that's an important person like a curator or it's always good when they know the work, it has been published, it's well known to other people...

[0:50:17] I think it's never a direct economics, it's a longer loop, it never happens that someone says "I've seen it in the magazines, I want to buy it". It just happened with Schoener Wohnen

it's a German magazine, like Brava Casa in Italy, widely spread, it's about living in a lifestyle, we received three emails and one on a magazine in a plane... everyone reads them, imagine how many have to read it that one drops you an email and those are the publications that brought more direct emails.

TT: But still they never bought anything, because the first thing they ask is where can I buy

it? How much is it? And that was for the ReLumine lamps and they have to go to the gallery and they are costly and there is a lot of work as well, so the price is actually not exaggerated is 2.500€ and there is a big margin percentage on that.

[0:51:45]

KM: But what's really good about articles, if you need to ask for fundings or you need to prove, in our first year we did a show of things in Berlin and we had funds from the Ministry of Culture and Education, a little fund I think it was 2.000€ to bring the stuff, travelling costs.

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But then we looked at media and in our end report we could report some articles and prove that we were really there, it makes things more round and it felt like they were really happy that they got something out of it like the money was worth spending it for them. In that sense it's really good and I think it gives you confidence to us. If we would need materials for a project we could still say that if we are lucky we could get a lot of press and we try to mention you. You know it's easier to argue certain things.

GI: Is that something you can offer them?

KM: It didn't happen at the moment, but I think we can use it. You know if it's a small company and they would give you the materials for free, you could say I'll try to mention you.

TT: I think that's good also for the commissioner in a way. Personally, I'm still very unhappy that Drawing Times wasn't published that much, because it's a really nice project, we really like it and the company that started the all platform called "This is my forest" where you don't just buy the floor, but you also buy a piece of forest, it's a real interesting thing, and we thought it would be cool to also via media that then people go to their home page and to recognize also the name because it was part of the title of the project. We thought it would really make sense and help them in this way, because they cancelled the project and everything.

[0:54:00]

GI: You think that by commissioning you, they expect although not explicitly that they would access certain contexts.

TT: You mean like media wise that they expect it will be published afterwards?

GI: Yes, if I commission Mischer'Traxler do you think I somehow have some expectations on where this project is going to be visible?

KM: I think it depends on who you are and why you commission. For example I think Wait and See installation we do, the installation in the concept store

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where we go tonight. I think they did it for certain media coverage. The owner is really nice and really interested in what we do and how we do thing, but I think she does it during the Salone just for media. Why would a fashion concept store? Yes they are interested in design, but of course they are not selling these pieces, they just want to be part of the design scene in a way.

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They hope that by working with us they get a bit more media coverage for example.

[0:55:37]

That's the purpose of things somehow. Why does Audi or Mercedes or Peugeot, there are so many car brands this year! Because they also want somehow some media coverage. Somewhere it says BMW was presenting blah blah blah during the Salone. The name is...

[0:56:00]

GI: Design is a very mediated realm, so...

TT: The Relumine lamps we had two at Dilmos and then we had an article on an Italian magazine, and Dilmos was not mentioned. Then we got an email and they said "couldn't you write that is also available in our gallery, especially in an Italian magazine?"

KM: and we were like, you know sometimes it takes 3 months before the article is produced



and by then we didn't even have the lamps at Dilmos. So we couldn't have mentioned. It's true we really try to mention who we work with, because that makes everyone happy if their names are mentioned. Really! And some are picky about it.

GI: The crediting is a delicate part.

KM: We try to be precise and some people appreciate that, some don't really care. But then you feel like "ok if I do it with one, I should do it with everyone, be fair to everyone" And some are really keen on it, some don't really mind.

[0:57:45]

GI: Do you struggle with those formulas like "supported by", commissioned by, empowered by, in collaboration with...?

[0:58:00]

KM: Yes. Just recently we were the leading article in a daily newspaper in Austria, like in inlay, and the gallery in Austria was like "yes it would be great if they could write about our name".

And I was like you know the gallery would be really happy if we somehow mention them, but they have a really long name, so I understand if you can't, but if you do they would be really happy. And then she managed to put the name in. Yeah you need to have a good feeling with the journalist that you can say you know they would be happy and then they get the chance to chose, you can't force somebody.

TT: I think that because you mentioned the "supported by" and "in collaboration with"

I think the easiest is the commission. Because you write "commissioned by" and then it's still obvious that is your work. Like we did the work and we didn't work together with them, so it's our work. For example in the Drawing Time they wanted to have the title like "in collaboration with" so they told us it would be nice to go for that formula, in a way it doesn't really matter because it's really obvious that we didn't do the floor, and they also supported us a lot with materials and everything, it was really great.

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But still, and then we did the project with Michael that helped us programming so we also wrote "in collaboration with and then brackets electronic development. Because he is also an artist in a way...

[1:00:00]

KM: It all mixes up

TT: yes it's our work, but we worked together with him in order to reach our ideas and not developing his idea. So supported by it's ok because that's mummy that ask you, but in collaboration with it's a difficult word.

GI: That's because networks are so complex and broad, but also because authorship is so important, and I can't really say why it's important but it is...

[1:02:00]

KM: I think it's because it's a personal thing, you know. Authorship is about you, and since it's so personal it's such a delicate thing how you mention it so everyone is happy, how you mention it that people understands it right and not wrong, it should be credited the right way, but it shouldn't be that is wrongly understood.

It's a really personal thing, for everyone involved cause it's about your head and your brain. Those little things are so important because they make a difference if it's your work or somebody else's work.

[1:04:04]

[...]

KM: I think certain projects just happen because of media coverage

GI: Does the calendar of events have an impact on your workflow?

KM: Yeah. When we were asked in April about giving a workshop in June, Thomas said maybe we should keep the Basel week free, cause you don't know what's going to happen.

To be honest... You wouldn't plan to go on Holidays during the Milan's fair Follow up on

*SKYPE, FRIDAY 8TH FEBRUARY 2013*

GI: About the finance of the project, What type of income you received from Carwan? Was it from the sales or you had a design fee?

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TT: Just on sales, a percentage. They are coordinating all the production and for each piece they sell we get 25% of the selling price. It doesn't sound a lot but they took care of all the work with the craftsmen.

KM: Once we sent all the drawings we were only involved in checking, but now it's really their thing

GI: Are the sales operated by Carwan or there are other galleries?

TT: Everything is with Carwan. I don't know if they are co-operating with other galleries. We don't know anything from our piece.

KM: Our piece is now on show with a museum.

GI: Are you updated where it goes?

*s[0:02:00]*

TT: yes, now it's at the Qatar Art Center in Doha. I think then will be travelling to Kuwait.

GI: So mainly in the middle east then?

TT: Actually yes, till now apart from Milan Everything else is very much in the middle east. I think that from Milan it went to Lebanon, Beirut, there it was shown twice. Now to Doha and then to Kuwait.

GI: Are you updated every time the piece is sold or at the end of the year you will talk about that?

TT: So far there were two pieces sold and they told us right in Milan. I guess they haven't sold any piece since then. Or we don't know yet and we also didn't ask.

GI: About the performance you did in Dubai. What are the reasons they gave you about doing the performance?

KM: That's a long story, actually the organizer from Dubai Design Days they already wanted to invite us to do a performance. They wanted to show Collective Works and the Mirror, everything that was in show in Basel. But then when we wrote how much transport would be for the people and the pieces they said it was pretty a lot. We tried to come out with another solution.

*s[0:04:00]*

TT: We said we could do a workshop with Reversed Volumes with the audience. We sent them 2-3 possibilities. They said everything was too expensive. Then we didn't hear anything for 2-3 months and then Nicolas called us "btw you will come to Dubai Design Days and build up the Marsharabiyia. In the meantime Design Days Dubai got in contact with Carwan cause they know they would have shown the piece and think that it was a cheaper combination for Design Days Dubai and a possibility for the gallery.

GI: After the performance was undertaken what benefits could you see for you and for the other parties?

TT: I think it was mainly for the others.

KM: We got a lot of feedback from the people in the region, from Arabian people that looked at this middleeastern piece. Their feedback was very good for us, to learn about their mentality and how they perceived it.

*s[0:06:00]*

TT: The piece would have been anyway at the gallery and we could have shown other work disconnected from the gallery. It could have been better for us.

GI: So for Carwan why do you think the performance was good or bad?

*s[0:07:32]*

KM: It really showed that the commissioned piece really had a strong connection with the middle east. By having us there, with the funny craftsman they could prove that in a way.

*s[0:08:00]*

TT: It added some attractiveness to the press and in general.

GI: Last time you told me there was also an Arab TV broadcaster there...

*s[0:08:58]*

KM: If we said it then it's true. I just don't remember because there is so many people from blogs or with a camera these days that there is so much movies and filming...

GI: For Roger you think it was a good thing?

KM: I think for him personally it was very good because he felt very special. In his position he is normally not visible and suddenly he got the high visibility, but in the long run I don't know if it really made a difference for him.

GI: And for the organizer of Design Days Dubai Cyril Zammit, why do you think he insisted so much on the performance?

*s[0:12:00]*

KM: He invited us and Drift from NL and Kwangho Lee. They were both disconnected from galleries.

GI: Do you think for Design Days Dubai the performance was a particularly good thing?

KM: I think they continue this year. I think it was good. Cyril knows a lot what Design Miami does...

GI: Was he trying to replicate a bit?

*s[0:14:00]*

KM: I think he was trying to bring a Miami version to Dubai. A fair with a bit of side programme, so that more people are inspired to go there even if they can't buy something. A sort of educational... every day there was a lecture... performances by the designers... he tried to set up a bit of an educational way And bringing the different design experiences to the middle east. I think he tries to bring a bit more than just galleries.

*s[0:14:18]*

GI: About Brownbook, the partnership with Carwan, I wanted to ask you what you think was their contribution to the project?

TT: The print version of this huge but thin printout, they produced that. But apart from that I don't know what they give.

*s[0:15:50]*

GI: Do you think for Carwan this was particularly beneficial?

KM: I just think they wanted to have a good relationship with the local press for the future.

TT: I think it was beneficial for both of them, there was the publication then presented in Milan, so they had the publication about the all concept of the exhibition and on the other hand Brownbook also had a kind of exhibition corner in Milan.

GI: And for you, was it beneficial to be published on Brownbook?

TT: It's super hard to say, maybe one day we go back to the MiddleEast and somebody recognizes us for Brownbook... it's always hard to tell. So far nothing happened, we haven't been back to the region, we don't know anybody who reads Brownbook and we never

received any email mentioning seeing our work on Brownbook. Still press has an influence it's hard to say in which way.

GI: Did this project in the Middle East opened up other possibilities for you?

KM: We were supposed to have an exhibition in New York which then didn't happen because of the flood, whose curator we met personally in Dubai.

*sf[0:18:00]*

But the project was cancelled. Gallery Lombard-Fried. More an art gallery than a design gallery. And the curator of the Qatar Art Center invited us to send a movie of The Idea of a Tre for an exhibition when they opened the design space. Most of the contacts from the project were managed via Carwan, so they decided where to make the next exhibition and so we were never really personally involved in there.

GI: Do you know if the craftsmen were paid by Carwan for their work? What kind of agreements they had?

*sf[0:20:36]*

TT: As far as we know they are payed by Carwan for their work. But I don't know their agreement in details. It's not based on sales, just a normal craftsmen relationship.

GI: Last year you said that Carwan since the beginning had a clear plan, with designers involved and presentations at certain venue. Did that play a role the fact that designers like Philippe Malouin was involved?

*sf[0:22:00]*

KM: It made a difference. Also that they had a plan with deadlines, a mission... We are quite picky about who else they represent and how we would fit...

GI: Maybe it's about reputation?

KM: Less than reputation it's more that they had a clear goal and a vision, a direction where to go. And a clear concept. We talked with Philippe we asked whether he was happy with the relationship and he said yes, he is nice. I have to say it was a good point that they are in the Middle East in a way. Cause if it was another gallery in London, or Paris...

*sf[0:24:00]*

Carwan is not fishing in the same waters as other galleries. It's not closing you any doors, that's why we want to work with them as well.

GI: Who do you think benefited the most from the media reports?

KM: For this particular piece it was better for Carwan. The vision the piece has, you don't initially see us. Once you get the story, you can connect it with us. But just visually from an image... If we give a talk with our work, most of the time we start with this project cause somehow we don't know where to fit it somewhere else.

GI: Last time you mentioned some funds from the Austrian Ministry of Culture and Education, was it in DMY?

TT: DMY 2009.

GI: What did you get the money for?

TT: We got invited by the curator of DMY Berlin to show in Berlin and we got the space for free. With this information we asked the Ministry of Culture and they said they always fund just 50%,

*sf[0:32:00]*

so we said we need to travel there, the hostel, the rent of a truck, then the set up of the stand needs the exhibition design, we put business cards and promotional material, and we listed the estimation of costs and we got half of it.

GI: And in exchange you had to include their logo?

*sf0:32:40]*

KM: A logo and a proper report. In Austria fundings are always in relation to proper reports.

TT: Then you have to include the press articles. You have to prove that you have used the money.

GI: The project for Wait and See last year, I wanted to ask you what did they ask for? A new project or exhibition of previous projects? What was the request?

KM: To fill the space! They wanted to have a new project, but we couldn't manage on time, and there was no budget at all. She said she would like to fill the space and show something, but there was no money at all for us, not for travelling, no materials...

*sf0:33:50]*

GI: Just the opportunities, the space...

KM: And all her relationships, press contact and she covered the opening. But she was very good in being critical, she refused 3 or 4 proposals and she said they were shallow, she wanted more of us and not just a representation. She wanted a proper project somehow. It was nice we had to go deeper. I think the project exists somehow just online. Because nobody really went there. Just a few people and at the opening was mainly her friends.

GI: Did she buy any of your pieces afterwards?

TT: No.

*sf0:36:00]*

GI: You said in Berlin you were presented by a gallery...

KM: Yes they constantly change their name. At the moment is called design and art. It-s a gallery in Vienna run by a very nice guy, but sometimes a bit slow in moving onwards and a bit afraid in investing. He is a nice person.

GI: That's your gallery in Vienna?

KM: Yes he has our Relumine lamps and sometimes we borrow a few pieces for an exhibition and then he gets a bit upset when we take them away he says "maybe I could sell them in the next two weeks" and we tell him he didn't sell them in the last half a year so maybe it's ok if we take them away for few weeks. They went to Qubique with us.

WEDNESDAY, 10TH JULY 2012 - NICOLAS PRIVATE HOME, MILAN

# Transcript Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte

■ visibility

■ autonomy

■ reputation

■ financial value

■ personal reward

Giovanni Innella: La prima domanda che ti farei e' di presentarti brevemente.

Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte: Come persona o come galleria?

GI: Secondo me come persona e poi vediamo il tuo ruolo nella galleria?

NB-L: D'accordo. Allora, io sono Canadese, sono nato a Montreal nel '79, sono cresciuto un po' dappertutto nell'Est del Canada, sul mare di qua e di la'. Prima di tornare a Montreal, dove ho fatto la mia formazione di architetto. Poi sono venuto a studiare in Italia, a Venezia, allo IUAV. Dopodiche' ho vinto anche una borsa di studio dal governo italiano per andare a Perugia a studiare Italiano e poi sono andato a Vienna a studiare il tedesco, poi a Berlino dove ho fatto il Master alla Berlinskunsthochschule [2:10], master di Interdisciplinargessutuaifjd, che sarebbe un misto di discipline tra arte visiva e architettura. Dopodiche' ho iniziato a lavorare con Tomas Demart [2:33] dove ho realizzare un po' di decor per lui. Poi ho iniziato a fare anche un po' di consultino per Mykita. Vedo che porti anche gli occhiali... e dopodiche' mi sono trasferito in Italia a Milano e ho iniziato un po' la mia attivita' nel mondo del design facendo parte di un collettivo canadese chiamato Samar, che ho fondato con altri architetti canadesi. E' un po' cosi' che ho iniziato un approccio un po' piu' all'oggetto funzionale. Anche con queste sedie, con quest'idea di proporre la tradizione, di portarla in un mondo piu' contemporaneo, per valorizzare... Poi attraverso queste esperienze ho viaggiato. Sono sempre stato affascinato dal Medioriente e ho iniziato a viaggiare li' e ono arrivato a Beirut, dopo vari viaggi in quella zona, siria' Egitto... Ho conosciuto Pascal Waki [3:57], che e' un architetto, che e' diventata una mia cara amica. A me Beirut aveva molto affascinato come citta'. La citta' e' molto interessante, soprattutto la prima volta che sono stato li' quattro anni fa, era una citta' ancora abbastanza vergine dal punto di vista di design, nel senso che non c'erano gallerie di design, c'erano pochi designer che avevano il loro showroom. Ed era pero' una citta' molto portata sugli interni, dove vedevi che c'era buon gusto e che la gente investiva tanto, perche' ha dei luoghi spettacolari. Devo dire che per me era una citta' che piaceva molto per il suo carattere cosmopolita. Sembra un po' Berlino, mischiato con un po' di carattere mediterraneo all'italiana, con questo un po' drammatico di vivere. Pero' con questo lato un po' cool di Berlino di ricerca anche, della gente, di essere molto socievoli i libanesi... E' quindi ho pensato che c'erano le condizioni per iniziare un progetto di galleria su Beirut. Lo dicevo a Pascal e lei mi diceva "Si, potremmo provare". E' sembrato un buon piano perche' Beirut e' anche la prima porta per il resto del Medioriente. Perche' praticamente il Golfo fa molto appello a Beirut per l'architettura, per la pubblicita', per il marketing sono i Libanesi ad avere il controllo su quello che succede in Qatar o negli Emirati... quindi e' anche un po' il modo per fare questo spread verso il Medioriente, avere Beirut come base. Perche' e' un po' la plaque tournant tra Europa e il resto del Medioriente. E per il fatto della lingua e' anche piu' comodo per me - non parlando arabo - con il francese e l'Inglese li' te la cavi benissimo. E quindi abbiamo fatto questa prima mostra un anno e mezzo fa a Beirut. Abbiamo portato tutti i designer che avevamo nella prima mostra li' per fare un simposio.

GI: Che designer avevate?

NB-L: Avevamo Philippe Malouin. Era la mostra di prima. Tanti sono poi ritornati ti spiego adesso perche', da dove viene questa mostra, dove abbiamo commissionato poi anche altri designer... C'era Lindse Adelman, Paul Lobanque, 45 Kilos, con quei ragazzi del Bauhaus - Bauhaus is better than yours, David Clapsing e il suo collega [7:09]... nella mostra avevamo anche Quan Brulli e anche jjng che e' un altro studio che ho fondato qui con Jacob Sap, un altro designer canadese cui vorrei fare un'altra parentesi dopo. Praticamente a questo

simposio avevamo invitato tutti questi designer a venire a Beirut e parlare del loro lavoro, ed e' una cosa abbastanza nuova che dei designer stranieri venissero a Beirut a parlare del loro lavoro. Praticamente ha suscitato tanto interesse con il patrocinio dell'ambasciata italiana, canadese, abbiamo avuto vari sponsor che volevano essere presenti per l'evento... avevamo avuto tantissimi visitatori, la televisione, una bella copertura come evento, come premiere e avevamo fatto anche con l'ALBA che e' l'academie delle belle arti del libano. Avevamo parlato anche di design, abbiamo fatto dei workshop con i designer che avevamo portato per i loro studenti. E da li' poi abbiamo ideato, l'idea di far un grand tour del libano per far vedere ai designer stranieri e anche i designer locali che conoscevano malissimo il loro tessuto dell'artigianato, che io avevo gia' visitato nei viaggi scorsi che avevo fatto... questi atelier che mi erano piaciuti... ho detto vale la pena fare questo. L'obiettivo del viaggio era arrivare a tripoli dove c'e' la fiera di Oscar Neimeyer che aveva fatta negli anni 70, ma bellissima, mai finita... con tutte queste strutture di cemento che e' un parco privato oggi. Quindi questo tour ha meravigliato tutti quanti. I designer li abbiamo portati a vedere quello che fa la marquetric, gli intarsi del legno, il lavoro del rame, il semant coloree che e' un'evoluzione del terrazzo italiano... tutto quello che c'era intorno al legno, metallo, cemento...

GI: Le connessioni con gli artigiani erano tue?

NB-L: Si erano degli artigiani che io avevo trovato, insieme ai nostri amici, Pascal essendo architetto li' ne conosceva alcuni. Abbiamo capito chi era il migliore del libano da vedere e abbiamo organizzato questo tour. Pero' era una cosa puramente informativa o formativa per tutti quanti. Gi artigiani hanno fatto tutte queste dimostrazioni del processo, di come si fa un oggetto, come si fa un intreccio, come si fa un intarsio... e tutti quanti sono rimasti stupiti da queste tecniche che non conoscevano bene. Nel bus i designer venivano a trovarmi dicendo "ma e' fantastica questa tecnica, dobbiamo fare un progetto insieme, voglio tornare a Beirut... io ho gia' un'idea... basterebbe cambiare la tecnica,,," sai Philippe Malouin mi diceva cosi' super entusiasta. Parlavo con Pascale... le dicevo guarda tutto questo interesse, potremmo fare la prossima mostra commissionare tutti gli oggetti e fare un team up di un designer con un artigiano, dove cerchiamo di lanciare una sfida per re-interpretare queste tecniche... una cosa nuova... un nuovo sguardo... tutti hanno detto SI, subito. Così siamo partiti subito con questo progetto nell'estate dell'anno scorso. Volevamo anche ampliare un po' i designer che avevamo, quindi abbiamo attribuito un designer ad un artigiano in base a quello che interessava loro e siamo andati avanti così, cercando di creare questo ponte tra il concept e il designer, la tecnica e l'eccellenza dell'artigiano e sposare un po' questa cosa per fare un limited edition. E li' ho conosciuto anche Katharina e Thomas quando ero a Basilea, avevo iniziato a parlare con loro e mi piaceva molto il loro approccio a livello del processo nel progetto del design. Secondo me questa era una cosa molto interessante da portare nella galleria ed ero convinto che poteva portare un profondita' nella mostra e tutto. E quindi e' nata l'idea di portarli, poi gli abbiamo dato anche la cosa piu' difficile da lavorare che e' la Mursharabilia, perche la mursharabilia hanno provato a rilavorarla in tanti designer anche del medi oriente ed e' molto difficile far qualcosa con la mursharabilia, e' stata rilavorata cambiata di materiali... e rimane sempre un po' pesante come risultato e percio' ero molto curioso di vedere quello che andavano a proporre loro. Katharina che si ostina... hanno cercato per settimane di trovare video di come si fa la mursharabilia e tutto... su youtube... e poi gli mandavo un po' di pubblicazioni... era bello questo processo... e poi devo dire che sono riusciti a creare un linguaggio molto bello, perche' la loro ricerca si vede attraverso l'oggetto. Dove praticamente si vede come ognuno dei 650 pezzi viene piu' e piu' lavorato per questo effetto. Tutta questa demarche che hanno fatto loro e' stata quella di imparare e e' proprio quello che fanno vedere nel loro processo, che trovo molto interessante. Ed anche come sono riusciti a cambiare l'oggetto e fare una cosa tridimensionale, che era una cosa nuova anche nel design, ma anche nel design orientale. Per quello chapeau a Katharina e Thomas. Devo dire che anche questo weekend per la Beirut art fair che abbiamo avuto, e' stato un'altra volta un successo... la gente viene chiamata appena vede questa console e' attratta subito e cerca di capirlo. Soprattutto per la popolazione di li' parla ancora di piu' perche' e' un linguaggio che e' il loro in termine di architettura indigene e tecnica locale... rivederlo cosi' in modo piu' astratto, pultio, semplice, ma anche con tanto dettaglio allo stesso tempo, li spazia. E' un effetto che trovo fantastico, poter suscitare questa emozione

anche sulla gente. Credo che la cosa bella e' che hanno aiutato molto anche la nostra galleria ad imporsi nel medio oriente in un certo modo. Perche' questo modo di chiamare direttamente il pubblico attraverso un oggetto, ha avuto l'effetto di creare nuovi collezionisti anche, di gente che non conosceva niente di design, ma che ha visto il pezzo ed ha detto lo voglio subito. Poi hanno allargato sugli altri pezzi della collezione. Naturalmente non tutti sono stati chiamati, pero' devo dire che questo e' stato un pezzo forte della nostra mostra che abbiamo attualmente.

GI: Tu Katharina e Thomas mi hai detto che li hai conosciuti a Basilea...

NB-L: Esatto

GI: Prima sapevi di loro?

NB-L: Avevo gia' visto qualche progetto magari in diagonale su internet, pero' non veramente. E devo dire che il mio progetto preferito che hanno fatto e' questo. Secondo me e' uno dei loro progetti che e' piu' finito, non so come dire... negli altri e' molto forte l'idea del processo, magari la macchina che costruisce i vasi in base al sole o altro o le installazioni che hanno fatto per Nescafe' piuttosto che gli altri lavori... i neon che si scambiano la luce... per me era quasi tra la performance e il ready made... un misto cosi'. Questo e' un altro step che hanno fatto che trovo interessante, quello di passare anche ad un oggetto un po' piu' finito.

GI: Loro mi dicevano che quando avete presentato a Design Days in Dubai avete comunque ricreato una performance. E' stata una decisione tua?

NB-L: Praticamente a design days dubai, noi eravamo una delle poche gallerie del medio oriente che faceva contemporaneo... i primi praticamente. E Cyril Zamit che e' il direttore della fiera Design Days Dubai subito ha creato in noi, nel nostro potenziale di diventare una galleria del Golfo, per quello ci ha dato un po' carta bianca.

Ha detto: "Nicolas, Pascal, secondo me questa mostra che state preparando e' fantastica e io sono disposto ad offrirvi uno spazio supplementare se volete organizzare una performance con dei designer a vostra scelta, se pensate che ci sia qualcosa di adatto." E noi subito abbiamo pensato a questo pezzo che e' stato anche a livello di produzione il nostro trauma, ma anche il suo fascino perche' non era facile per niente... abbiamo fatto tanti prototipi che non hanno funzionato, poi come lavorano li' non e' come lavorano i falegnami in Austria o in nord Europa, e' un modo un po' piu' approssimativo, soprattutto quando gli dai un progetto per la prima volta... poi ci sono anche dei costi relativi alla cosa perche' e' fatto in legno massello con tutti i pezzi diversi... quando ne butti una via, hai il cuore che ti fa cosi'...e poi ci avviciniamo anche al lancio a Dubai... il tempo con cui e' stato fatto tutto e' stato un miracolo. Per questa performance per noi era naturale presentare questo progetto perche' e' molto spettacolare. Con queste mensoline sui muri dello stand, piccole piccole, con tutti i 650 pezzi li... con Katharina, Thomas, piu' Roger l'artigiano libanese, facevano questo trio fantastico. La gente rimaneva molto affascinata, perche' era una cosa molto bella per loro. OK fai il giro delle gallerie, vedi prodotti bellissimi, pero' poi quando arrivi su, un luogo dove senti di entrare in un atelier e' un altro sentimento anche rispetto al progetto... di capire il processo, ma credo anche l'oggetto finito lo vedi e questa performance e' stata fantastica perche' si capisce tutto il processo.... Ogni giorno andavano avanti a montarlo, poi alla fine della settimana avevano assemblato il tutto. Era una cosa molto spettacolare, e cosi' positivo...

devo dire che una copertura stampa cosi' non l'avevamo mai avuta. Tutti quanti i giornalisti che sono andati a Dubai l'hanno pubblicato questo evento. Ed ha avuto cosi' tanto successo che adesso Sirin ci ha dato carta bianca per il prossimo anno per fare un'altra performance di questo livello a Dubai, li' sara' difficile.

GI: Dicevi dei media report che avete ricevuto, ce ne' qualcuno in particolare che consideri di valore... che ti ha appagato?



NB-L: Allora, senz'altro BrownBook, non so se hai visto la pubblicazione a Milano... quella grande...

GI: Sì. Ecco mi racconti un po'...

NB-L: Dunque, BrownBook è un magazine di lifestyle e design, architettura, specializzato in quello che succede in Medioriente. I fratelli Bin Shabib [23:11], che ho conosciuto per la prima volta durante Design Days Dubai, sono rimasti molto impressionati dalla performance, vedi questa e' la foto dello stand a Dubai, e praticamente ci han detto che dovevamo assolutamente fare qualcosa insieme. Poi gli ho detto che volevamo ripetere questa performance a Milano. E gli ho proposto di fare questa collaborazione, perche' non tutti sanno cos'e' una Marsharabilia, loro han detto "vabbe' facciamo un bel libro dove parliamo della vostra galleria, della missione, di che cosa e' la Marsharabilia, di esempi nel mondo dell'arte contemporanea e anche e soprattutto parliamo della vostra performance e del pezzo che hanno realizzato Mischer'Traxler. Poi hanno creato questo book bellissimo, grande cosi' che poi abbiamo ripresentato anche adesso alla Beirut Art Fair. E' questo e' un po' il massimo che si puo' trarre da una partnership con un media. Un media partner. Perche' il tutto e' nato da un loro interesse del pezzo e poi siamo riusciti a fare una diffusione molto interessante. Poi ovviamente ci sono tutte le altre riviste, Wallpaper, ArtTravel... che hanno fatto dei reportage molto belli e interessanti, pero' questo e' proprio di fondo ed e' quello che mi piaceva perche' e' quasi una monografia, piccola ovviamente, col tempo che avevamo di realizzarla tra Dubai e Milano, che pero' ti da una bella idea del progetto, di che cosa e' una mursharabilia.

GI: Dal punto di vista commerciale e' incredibile che non c'e' una pubblicata' in questo.

NB-L: No, no... esatto.

GI: Voi con Brownbook avete un accordo commerciale?

[0:25:37]

NB-L: Diciamo che per loro era un modo di farsi conoscere a Milano, dopo Beirut, e devo dire che ha funzionato molto bene, perche' a Milano noi gli abbiamo dedicato un corner nella galleria.

GI: Ho visto. Tra l'altro la rivista e' bellissima. Ho preso tutti i numeri...

NB-L: Anche le loro city guides che hanno messo li' erano molto belle... quando fai un viaggio a Jeddah... tutte le citta' piu' particolari del medi oriente che non sono le solite... sai le city guides sono le solite New York, Parigi, Londra... basta... tutti gli fanno adesso... A me piaceva tanto l'idea di andare a Theran con questa city guide di cool insiders.

GI: Quindi avete una sorta di partenrship informale con Brwonbook?

[0:26:41]

NB-L: Esatto, che e' molto di cuore. Noi come galleria, i nostri partnership sono molto di feeling. Facciamo piu' o meno tutto per passione. Il nostro scopo e' di realizzare un progetto che ci stimola e che ci spinge oltre quello che e' gia' stato fatto, anche il concept di commissionare... e' sempre una grande passione ma che ci da anche un valore aggiunto rispetto ad una galleria classica che magari si accontenta di selezionare designers che a loro piacciono e di metterli insieme. Noi siamo piu', forse perche' io e Pascal abbiamo un background di architetto e designer... questo condiziona tanto l'orientazione della galleria. Perche' siamo molto attivi nella realizzazione dell'oggetto, praticamente siamo noi che facciamo la realizzazione dell'oggetto a Beirut.

GI: Questo e' un aspetto interessante. Thomas e Katharina mi dicevano che per la prima volta non hanno dovuto realizzare l'oggetto. Questo e' fantastico perche' hai un professionista che lo fa per te, dall'altra parte e' pauroso perche' non hai controllo. In questo caso qual'e' stato il vostro ruolo nel mediare tra designer e artigiano?

NB-L: Diciamo che siamo stati un po' i contre-maitre de chantier, nel senso che il lavoro piu' difficile, che ti fa impazzire di piu' e' sempre controllare il dettaglio... saper trattare con l'artigiano, dire si/no/si/no, rifai di nuovo, stabilire il limite di fin dove si puo' spingere. Perche' ovviamente il designer riceve il campione o vede la foto e dice "non mi piace, rifai"... c'e' un limite che magari il designer dallo studio a Vienna, Londra, New York, non capisce che l'artigiano non puo' andare oltre, che si deve comporre anche con il fattore umano fino ad un certo punto. Il nostro ruolo e' stato quello di mediatore e di saper interpretare al meglio l'idea del designer per trasmetterla con il lavoro dell'artigiano. Ed e' stata una cosa fantastica anche tra l'altro, perche' cosi' riesci anche un po' ad inserire il tocco per dare uniformita' all'insieme della collezione, della mostra che stai creando. Perche' ovviamente quando dici a uno di lavorare questi materiali, con questo artigiano, che spingi in una certa direzione, sara' sempre una cosa in discussione con loro. Faccio una proposta... secondo me e' ben inquadrato rispetto al concept della nostra mostra e si sta ancora evolvendo nella nostra mostra, perche' stiamo integrando... abbiamo due show che sono stati confermati, uno al Beirut Art Center il 10 Ottobre e poi al Qatar Art Center il 15 Febbraio. E quindi per queste due mostre che si sono aggiunte, poi siamo in trattativa per un'altra aggiuntiva a Rihad in Arabia Saudita... e quindi ci piace molto aggiungere una novita', perche' ovviamente ogni museo vuole una cosa esclusiva da aggiungere. Per noi e' molto bello poter giocare con la mostra: ingrandirla o modificarla, mano a mano che andiamo avanti. E adesso probabilmente includeremo un designer Libanese nuovo e un designer del Qatar...

GI: Sempre con artigiani del Libano?

NB-L: O Libano, o del Qatar, anche se non c'e' granché... penso saranno probabilmente del Libano, pero' non e' detto perche' con Jalid Chaffar [32:00], un designer Emiratino, abbiamo lavorato con un artigiano di la' di Dubai che fa' Jegal, questi che vedi sull'estintore... questo e' un po' brutto, secondo me fatto in Cina, pero' ci sono quelli belli che portano i principi, e praticamente sono fatti di lana e di seta a mano e lui aveva fatto un sistema di paraventi e di luminarie con questi e struttura in ottone, che fa un po' anni 60.

GI: Quindi in senso ampio cosa avete offerto a Katharina e Thomas?

NB-L: Noi abbiamo offerto un'opportunita' di conoscere una cultura della quale conoscevano poco, perche' ci han detto anche loro che non avevano mai messo piede in medio-oriente, che era la prima volta quando sono arrivati li'. E' un progetto che secondo me e' stato molto interessante, perche' anche loro sono rimasti sorpresi dell'andamento del progetto e anche a Dubai stesso non pensavano niente di come poteva andare avanti la storia. Perche' a Dubai c'e' il principe Zayed bin-Khalifa

[0:33:40]

, che e' la famiglia del BurSaifa, che e' la torre piu' alta del mondo, che e' la famiglia regente di Abu Dabi, e il principe in persona e' venuto sul loro stand per capire come si faceva tutto... che poi e' un ragazzo, ha 23 anni, pero' di una serenita' e di una curiosita' incredibile, molto umile, molto simpatico, e gli ha fatto molto piacere conoscere, Katharina, Thomas e Roger l'artigiano e per loro credo sia stata un'esperienza molto particolare, presentare un progetto a un principe,

[0:34:29]

che poi l'ha anche acquistato tra l'altro come anche un'altra principessa di Dubai che era anche venuta alla nostra mostra. Quindi secondo me siamo riusciti a creare questo scambio culturale, a farli andare su una nuova strada che magari non avevano esplorato fino ad adesso, siamo riusciti a creare un oggetto che considero molto interessante e innovativo e anche che secondo me che rappresenta un valore reale di collezione, perche' e' una cosa storica di portare degli austriaci a lavorare con un libanese e di creare un oggetto del genere... una cosa mai vista nel mondo del design. E quindi anche da un punto di vista di collezione, di storia del design, del limited edition, e' un punto molto interessante, un capitolo che si e' aperto. E anche abbiamo chiuso con un aspetto positivo anche economico, che poche gallerie e istituzioni sono in grado di offrire ai designer,

[0:35:45]

perche' noi siamo capaci di generare anche degli ordini reali, di vendite e di portare anche

delle sovvenzioni che li portano a portare avanti il loro lavori, che il mondo del collezionismo in Europa e' magari un po' meno immediato rispetto al medi oriente. Quindi per quello e' stata un'opportunita' molto interessante anche per loro.

GI: I pezzi adesso che vita hanno? Viaggiano? Cosa fanno?

NB-L: Il prototipo numero uno che hanno fatto, viaggia. Adesso era a Beirut, all'art fair, fara' il BAC questo autunno in Qatar, poi Rihad vediamo... c'e' una serie di mostre in programma. E' una cosa molto interessante- ne parlo in maniera molto informale perche' non e' ancora confermato, ma ci sono buone possibilita' - e' un progetto di alleanza con una galleria di San Francisco, molto bella... il direttore e' un mio caro amico. Lui e' rimasto molto affascinato di questo oggetto e vorrebbe fare un solo show, la Mursharabilia vista da Mischer'Traxler. Quindi estendere questo sistema a diversi oggetti, un mondo di Mischer'Traxler con l'artigiano libanese, la mursharabilia...

[0:37:43]

e lui conosce anche tutti i clienti della silicon valley e sa gia' che sara' un successone. Secondo me e' una bella opportunita' quella che arriva come evoluzione del progetto anche. Anche soltanto questo weekend a Beirut, tanti architetti e collezionisti sono passati super interessati, che volevano magari un pezzo fatto su misure, piu' lunga o piu' alta per un progetto o una casa loro. Sono tutte opportunita' interessanti che stiamo cercando di creare.

GI: E si vengono a creare dopo il progetto?

NB-L: Esatto. Non ci limitiamo solo a questa collezione di 10 pezzi, andiamo oltre a questo facendo magari una collezione parallela.

GI: Oltre al trading di oggetti, quali sono le attivita' della galleria?

NB-L: Facciamo tanta ricerca sull'artigianato e sul potenziale nel design contemporaneo di fare questi match. Adesso stiamo lavorando sul nuovo progetto per Design Miami a dicembre, dove il lavoro della ricerca continua. Mostre su mostre, se succedono, devi sempre avere una novita' o qualcosa di interessante da proporre. Quindi facciamo sempre questa ricerca, spingere oltre il limite, ed il risultato estetico che si puo' generare, ma anche costruttivo, perche' quell'aspetto costruttivo e' molto importante per noi, partendo dal nostro background di architetto. Le nostre mostre hanno un carattere molto forte, cerchiamo sempre una certa unita' che hanno questo punto comune di costruzione dell'oggetto. La nostra ricerca e' tanto su queste tecniche. Poi c'e' l'aspetto promozionale che viene insieme a tutto questo, anche l'aspetto curatoriale di ricerca di posizionamento, di dove mettere... in quale museo... quale art fair...

GI: Avete una strategia?

NB-L: Si e' molto importante la strategia se uno deve dare un'idea precisa di dove vuole arrivare, se non hai un obiettivo ti perdi.

GI: Dalla visibilita' ottenuta da questo progetto, come avete beneficiato?

NB-L: Tu dici della mostra o di Mischer'Traxler?

GI: Entrambi

NB-L: Noi siamo andati molto step by step, da quando abbiamo aperto la galleria due anni fa. Si e' fatto un po' in modo naturale. Questo e' stato un altro step che abbiamo superato, grazie alla qualita' della mostra, avevamo dei designer che hanno fatto dei pezzi molto fantastici, dal mio punto di vista.

[0:42:19]

Ci ha permesso di creare questa identita' piu' precisa della galleria. Questa identita' piu' precisa ovviamente ha fatto una certa fama, un establishment piu' pesante, che ci fa pesare di piu'. Adesso magari a livello internazionale, quando si tratta di organizzare una mostra

siamo ricevuti in un altro modo che due anni fa. Hanno partecipato alla crescita della galleria e secondo me noi vogliamo sempre mantenere questa idea di crescere proponendo sempre progetti sperimentali che ci stimolano molto, sia che di passione che di ricerca di sistemi di costruzione che sono anche molto semplici nel medi oriente, ma che possiamo rivisitare. Per noi la galleria e' una piattaforma che ci permette di generare tutto questo.

GI: I collezionisti danno valore alle pubblicazioni, piuttosto che le acquisizioni nei musei? Oppure il loro criterio e' diverso?

NB-L: E' molto difficile capire il collezionista di design. Non e' come il collezionista dell'arte contemporanea. Tanti sono dei grandi fan che sono molto spesso architetti, che hanno magari iniziato con il modernariato, e adesso sono sul contemporaneo, hanno seguito questo switch che c'e' stato. Altri seguono sicuramente le pubblicazioni. Devo dire che le pubblicazioni hanno un impatto molto a lungo termine, non immediato. Spesso uno pensa "ah e' uscito su Domus, e' uscito su Artaurea...", magari magazine piu' specializzati per collezionisti perche' non ho ricevuto 3000 chiamate dopo da gente che va a comprare subito?... questo e' un fenomeno che noi abbiamo cercato di palliare, perche' la mostra ci ha insegnato molto su questo mondo. Magari esci su Wallpaper, vendi un pezzo o due e basta. E tu ti chiedi come mai, Wallpaper e' cosi' world wide read e tutto. Questo ci ha insegnato che la strada del creare o fomentare un collezionista e una nostra missione, perche' il mondo del design e' una cosa nuova. E Dubai e' stato l'esempio perfetto per quello, la prima fiera di design della storia ad aver luogo li', e' stata visitata in modo affollato, in mondo pazzesco, che non mi aspettavo neanche. La gente e' venuta e ha comprato quello che si sentiva di comprare, non hanno neanche comprato i grandi nomi, ma si sono confrontati con l'oggetto, se ne sono innamorati, hanno detto "va bene lo prendo". E questa e' secondo me una cosa fantastica perche' li' si capisce tutto il potere che puo' avere un oggetto, che non e' soltanto prouve', magari uno che compra prouve' non gli piace neanche prouve', ma sa che domani lo potra' rivendere con il 15% in piu' di quello che ha comprato. E' un po' un peccato ovviamente. Ovviamente quando parliamo del XX secolo e' un altro discorso, e' anche una categoria molto piu' facile come galleria fare del modernariato. Pero' noi crediamo nel contemporaneo e secondo me ci stiamo riuscendo abbastanza bene a creare questo mercato, e' tanto lavoro, e anche una bella sfida perche' cerchiamo di non sparare troppo sui prezzi, di proporre pezzi che sono piu' alla portata di tutti. Magari non abbiamo dei margini della madonna come altre gallerie, pero' crediamo nel costruire la nostra clientela piano piano e poi un giorno saremmo sulla via giusta. Perche' il mercato del design in edizione limitata e' ancora una novita', la sua espansione non si capisce ancora bene dove andra' e cosa succedera'.

GI: Carwan si intreccera' mai con l'industria? O rimarra' sul collezionismo?

[0:48:08] [0:48:08]

NB-L: Diciamo che l'unico modo di intrecciarsi con l'industria e' che possiamo essere fonte di ispirazione per aziende, come gia' abbiamo fatto. Abbiamo fornito dei designer a Ceccotti in Italia ad esempio. Ovviamente nelle nostre mostre, come abbiamo fatto qui a Milano a Ventura Lambrate sono passati tutti quanti e ovviamente poi i designer hanno anche avuto delle commissioni dopo.

GI: Le aziende sono passate attraverso voi per contattare i designer?

NB-L: Veramente no. Ovviamente questo e' un po' un peccato perche' quando sei una galleria le spese sono molto importanti per portare una mostra a livello interessante e sarebbe stato interessante che le aziende avessero un po' piu' di interesse a fare un discorso di consultino con le gallerie. "Io voglio fare un pezzo del genere, secondo voi? Magari venite, ne parliamo insieme" Quelle sono sfide alle quali noi siamo molto aperti a partecipare.

[0:49:00]

Piano piano, ci arriviamo anche, perche' vedo che nascono nuove art fair di qua e di la' e ci chiedono anche non solo di partecipare ma di dare una mano nell'organizzazione e nel montaggio di queste nuove art and design fairs. Come nuovi progetti nel medi oriente soprattutto perche' e' li' che siamo un po' gli specialisti diciamo. Pero' sicuramente e' un mercato in divenire e stiamo cercando di spingere questa direzione.

# **APPENDIX IV: INTERVIEWS CASE STUDY 3**

# Transcript Mario Minale (Minale-Maeda)

■ visibility

■ autonomy

■ reputation

■ financial value

■ personal reward

Giovanni Innella: Potresti introdurti brevemente?

Mario Minale: Sono Mario Minale dello studio Minale Maeda. Siamo uno studio di design con indirizzo concettuale. Ci siamo stabiliti dopo aver studiato alla Design Academy a Rotterdam. Lavoriamo su progetti con clienti come Droog, qualche galleria e su progetti auto-iniziate e a volte anche auto-prodotti. Concettuale nel senso che siamo relativamente critici verso la nostra professione e cerchiamo di sviluppare e di tener conto quella che è la realtà della professione oggi.

GI: I contesti delle gallerie e di Droog, sono contesti in cui vi trovate a vostro agio?

[0:02:00]

MM: No. Li trovo estremamente difficili. A parte la discussione che ognuna di queste realtà è diversa, se lavori per le gallerie allora ci sono determinate cose, per l'industria altre cose succedono, autoproduzione e' ancora un altro discorso. A parte questo, se lavori con un cliente che non è ben chiaro come utilizzerà il risultato prodotto, rende ancora più confusione. Per esempio quando lavoriamo con le gallerie a volte è andato tutto bene, a volte è stato semplicemente che anche il gallerista non sapeva bene che aria tirava, allora all'ultimo momento vedi che loro non sanno bene, la sera prima di Basilea magari rigirano tutto, perché dicono "ah ma guarda le altre gallerie". Per cui è un mercato molto volatile. Quindi con la galleria fai dei pezzi anche molto belli, puoi completamente andare al limite, però non sai mai se veramente è una cosa che funziona, che viene apprezzata, accolta nel modo giusto, etc... Con l'industria il discorso è che non riesci affatto ad andare quanto vorresti, quindi devi fare tantissime concessioni a produzione in India o in Cina.

GI: Quindi la tua dimensione ideale rimane quella delle gallerie?

MM: No, diciamo che la dimensione ideale è di lavorare con delle aziende che ti danno il giusto supporto.

[0:03:51][0:03:51]

E questo non è solo in termine finanziario, ma più che altro per noi è in termine di conoscenza.

[0:04:00]

Per esempio un'azienda che è esperta in un determinato campo, per esempio di stoffa, di legno, o di qualsiasi tipo di manifattura, tu nel progetto impari anche tantissimo e poi arrivi anche ad un progetto veramente valido. Mentre invece se lavori con un'azienda che fa velocemente e deve avere il prodotto pronto presto, allora non ne hai niente, si magari vendono i pezzi, però non è che ti permette qualche riflessione in più, di conoscere qualche altra tecnica, di sviluppare qualcosa.

GI: Voi siete interessati nei processi di produzione industriale dal punto di vista tecnico?

MM: Beh ci sono tante dimensioni. Uno è sicuramente il punto di vista tecnico e del materiale e del processo, etc... E l'altro è anche la relazione tra industria e società, che ruolo ha, il mercato, come si vende, come si presenta. Secondo noi è necessario uno sviluppo dall'industria al monolitica, enorme, grande, azienda multinazionale di una volta, verso aziende più piccole, ma questo non è un discorso che facciamo solo noi, è un discorso comune oggi. In quel senso, se si riesce nel prodotto, in qualche modo a prendere influenza su questa cosa, è una cosa che ci interessa molto. E può essere semplicemente l'utilizzo di determinati materiali, piuttosto che altri, piuttosto che di dove.

[0:06:00]

In Italia c'è ancora una grandissima manodopera, quindi se trovi un'industria che lavora

con questa manodopera, con questi artigiani, allora lo trovo molto piu' interessante piuttosto che l'industria che usa lavoro non qualificato come la cina, l'india.

GI: Credi che i vostri contenuti critici e concettuali possano essere sviluppati all'interno dell'industria?

MM: Alla fine ritengo piu' importante svilupparli all'interno di un'industria che all'interno del contesto della galleria.

[0:06:31] [0:06:31]

Il contesto della galleria e' interessante perche' in qualche modo raggiungi i curatori, i critici, i giornalisti, gente che e' interessata ad un discorso di un certo livello, che a loro volta promuovono questo progetto, e promuovono le tue idee, i tuoi risultati, pero' il vero cambiamento, secondo me avviene cambiando l'industria. Che non e' una cosa facile, non e' che tutti siano interessati e disposti a questo.

GI: I vostri artefatti, i vostri oggetti sono delle riflessioni, riuscite a condividere queste riflessioni? Il pubblico le percepisce?

[0:08:00]

MM: Dipende dal pubblico. Lavorando con la galleria, ci sono vari tipi di clienti per la galleria, c'e' il cliente esperto di design, che ha un interesse magari nel prototipo, nel processo, e allora questi sono interessati; altri sono piu' interessati ad un oggetto di una certa esclusivita' e a questo punto il pensiero che c'e' dietro non viene necessariamente colto.

Lo stesso vale per l'industria: c'e' l'industria interessata effettivamente a rinnovarsi, e c'e' l'industria che e' interessata a vendere. Con una galleria come Droog loro sono interessati al concetto, all'idea, per quanto Droog sia una galleria, diciamo quando si presentano cosi'. Loro fanno concessioni al fatto che ci sono clienti facoltosi che vogliono semplicemente un bell'oggetto e non stai li' a dirgli "devi capire perche' e' bello"

GI: In quale momento della vita dei vostri progetti, secondo te l'aspetto concettuale viene consumato dal pubblico?

MM: Dunque, secondo me alla fine si riesce solo a rendere la totalita' del progetto al momento di una presentazione dedicata. Gia' se fai una mostra ci vuole un visitatore molto attento perche' ci saranno 10-20 progetti uno vicino all'altro, quindi ci vuole abbastanza attenzione. Se faccio una lecture o c'e' una visita in studio allora funziona meglio.

[0:10:00]

Tipo sono venuti degli studenti a vedere e quello e' stato il momento perfetto per approfondire determinati discorsi. C'e' un contatto diretto, e' quella la cosa migliore. Poi a parte quella, secondo me comunque tutto il contenuto concettuale che ci puo' essere, se non fa una differenza nell'oggetto e nell'uso dell'oggetto, o nella produzione dell'oggetto, e' meno valido. Secondo me deve avere comunque una ripercussione pratica, che magari non si capisce, pero' fa un cambiamento, o altrimenti ci vuole davvero una comunicazione diretta in qualche modo.

GI: Per quanto riguarda il progetto selezionato, mi puoi spiegare un po' quale e' stato il tuo ruolo nel progetto?

MM: Lo specchio di cui parliamo e' nato come reazione su un altro progetto. C'e' stato un brief di dare nuova vita ad oggetti di aziende fallite.

[0:12:00]

Abbiamo applicato una delle idee che seguiamo sempre, ovvero il fatto che degli oggetti cio' che conta e' soprattutto la percezione e la presentazione degli oggetti. L'immagine e' talmente forte che domina tutti gli altri aspetti. Questo puo' avere una connotazione negativa come quando si dice "ha una bella apparenza ma c'e' poca sostanza", ma noi non volevamo calcare questo fatto. Piuttosto vogliamo trovare modi di usare questo fatto. Tu puoi avere un oggetto molto semplice, nel momento in cui tocchi i giusti pulsanti e metti la ciliegina sulla torta, riesci a realizzare un progetto che anche tramite l'uso di materiali semplici e tecnologie semplice, puo' essere molto economico, abbordabile, sostenibile,

etc... Nonostante tutto, tocca quello che sono le sensibilita' estetiche, fashion del pubblico. Tutto questo va indietro ad una ricerca che abbiamo fatto alcuni anni fa, dove abbiamo cercato di capire nella piramide delle necessita' di Masloff, dove si esprime il quinto livello, cioe' quello dell'auto-realizzazione, che secondo noi e' l'unico che spinge le persone a consumare, perche' tutte le necessita' di base nel mondo sviluppato sono coperte.

[0:14:00]

Praticamente e' solo il contenuto simbolico dell'oggetto, questo lo dicevano gia' i filosofi francesi negli anni '70-80. A questo punto e' una ricerca di come utilizzare queste capacita' del designer di curare l'immagine e l'impressione di un oggetto in una maniera che sia sostenibile, innovativa e che non bada solo al marketing. Ovviamente e' un po' un gioco col fuoco perche' la tentazione di fare l'oggetto spettacolare e' sempre grande. Questa e' un'idea che cerchiamo sempre di comunicare. Se noi potessimo dire semplicemente quello che vorremmo esprimere nei nostri oggetti e' che oggi niente e' quello che sembra, meno che mai. L'idea dello specchio era che era uno specchio semplicemente argentato con una cornice bianca, abbiamo pensato che se noi coloriamo la riflessione dello specchio ecco che cambia tutto. Infatti cosi' e' stato.

[0:15:40]

Questo e' stato uno dei progetti piu' interessanti della presentazione "Saved by Droog", tant'e' vero che il primo giorno l'oggetto aveva un prezzo di 250€, il secondo giorno l'oggetto aveva un prezzo di 600€...

[0:16:00]

GI: Poi l'oggetto si e' evoluto in un prodotto?

MM: Esatto. E li' e' una questione di dove lo presenti. E' stato presentato a Basilea. Per Basilea ovviamente e' un mercato diverso. Un mercato che magari fa anche piu' conto sull'oggetto esclusivo. Allora nella ricerca per cambiare il colore degli specchi recuperati avevamo trovato un materiale che per quel progetto li' era proibitivo nei costi, pero' era proprio quello che volevamo. Dal punto di vista del design, della percezione, era perfetto, un vetro particolare.

[0:16:51]

Basilea ci ha dato la possibilita' di non badare ai costi e di realizzare l'oggetto cosi' come lo intendevamo.

GI: Questo oggetto secondo te sarebbe mai esistito se non ci fosse stato Saved by Droog?

[0:18:00]

Questo e' difficile da dire, perche' e' una dimensione di ricerca che noi seguiamo. E' sempre difficile rispondere a domande di questo genere... E' stato un progetto cui per noi e' stato molto immediato reagire, perche' avevamo gia' trattato specchi prima, e lo specchio e' un oggetto che ci interessa. Poi andava bene giocare sul cambiare la percezione dell'oggetto. E' stata una combinazione fortunata.

GI: Pero' hai ammesso tu stesso che Basilea e' stato il contesto che ha reso possibile il progetto.

MM: Questo certamente.

GI: Ti capita spesso di iniziare progetti per un evento o pubblicazione?

MM: Ci sono molte opportunita' per questo. Ovviamente quando lavori per le gallerie, queste vogliono sempre avere un contenuto nuovo per una determinata mostra. Puo' essere Basilea, come puo' essere Miami, allora si', si fanno dei progetti dedicati.

[0:19:21]

Non necessariamente questi si iniziano per quell'evento, puo' essere anche una cosa che uno ha in stock gia' da un po' di tempo, ci stava riflettendo, allora trova il contesto giusto per questo progetto, et... Credo che sia importante, perche' soprattutto nei progetti liberi, dove non hai un brief, risolvi questo problema, o cose del genere, allora a meno che hai molto molto tempo, non e' sempre facile dire, parto con qualcosa di completamente nuovo. Comunque ti riferisci al lavoro che hai fatto prima.



[0:20:00]

GI: Quali altri attori erano coinvolti in questo progetto?

MM: Ovviamente gli artigiani che erano coinvolti nella produzione. E' un'azienda specializzata, tra l'altro italiana di terza generazione in Olanda a Tillburg. Loro fanno queste forme di cemento per giardino, lavandini... quindi siamo andati da loro con questa idea e il problema tecnico e' che e' una cornice molto sottile. Pero' volevamo il cemento, quindi c'e' stata una ricerca per risolvere questa cosa. Poi l'azienda che ha realizzato il telaio in metallo che mantiene il cemento e lo specchio, e poi l'azienda che fornisce gli specchi che dovevano essere adattati, dovevano essere laminati perche' questo colore di per se non e' molto resistente, se lo si pulisce puo' graffiarsi e su un oggetto di un certo valore non e' possibile, allora tutte piccole soluzioni di dettaglio...

[0:22:00]

GI: E fuori dalla produzione?

MM: A dire il vero per Basilea esisteva gia' un altro progetto per Droog, e questo e' stato un progetto proposto all'ultimo momento, in aggiunta. Abbiamo detto loro: "guardate c'e' Basilea, perche' non utilizzare quel bel materiale che non abbiamo potuto usare per Saved by Droog?" E alla prima proposta sono stati subito disponibili.

GI: La vostra carriera e' cruscuita all'interno di Droog. Cosa puoi dirmi della relazione con Droog?

MM: In un certo senso si. Quando hanno preso il mio progetto di tesi, e' stato il primo oggetto che ho venduto in sostanza tramite loro. In seguito a quello, ogni anno c'e' stato qualche assignment. "Cresciuto" e' sempre relativo, nel senso che Droog sono sempre molto bravi nella parte concettuale, poi non necessariamente sono i piu' efficienti a produrre, a portare in produzione un oggetto, distribuirlo, etc... Per conto mio questo non e' un problema, diventa un problema nel momento in cui loro vogliono prendersi quella responsabilita' e poi non riescono a dar seguito.

[0:24:00]

GI: Voi questo progetto non avete mai provato a proporlo ad aziende nell'industria?

MM: A dire il vero ogni volta che viene mostrato, come di recente a Milano dove abbiamo mostrato un'altra variazione su questo, arriva sempre qualcuno da un'industria che chiede le licenze per produrre, etc... Poi dipende dall'azienda, ed e' un discorso delicato questo. Certe aziende lo vogliono solo per determinati mercati, o lo vogliono sotto determinate condizioni vincolate alle tecniche in loro possesso, per avere un prezzo competitivo, e cio' determina certi compromessi... alla fine alla fine, sono comunque oggetti che hanno un mercato dedicato, e io penso che la maniera migliore sia sempre l'auto produzione, trovando eventualmente il giusto distributore. Uno che ti passi gli ordini.

GI: Chi ha fatto la foto che vedo sui media?

MM: Io

GI: Ti capita spesso di fare le foto ai tuoi progetti?

[0:26:00]

MM: Continuamente. Finite all'ultimo lavorando. Stiamo cercando di migliorare su questo aspetto e lasciare piu' tempo per trovare il giusto fotografo, etc...

Pero' questo era un oggetto abbastanza facile da fotografare e io un po' me ne intendo. Tra l'altro in questa foto l'oggetto sembra appesa al muro. In verita' lo specchio e' steso per terra su delle piastre di polistirolo e io sono salito su una scala e l'ho fotografato da sopra. Alla fine conta la presentazione...

GI: Sulla circolazione dell'immagine e della comunicazione. Io immagino che sia voi che Droog abbiate mandato in giro la press release.

MM: Esatto

GI: C'è una differenza di network fra voi?

MM: Sicuramente. Tant'è vero che questo specchio ha vinto il Wallpaper design award. Io sospetto per la tempistica di come è andata la cosa, che stranamente una pubblicazione a Wallpaper non è nello stretto network di Droog.

[0:27:15]

Perché subito dopo il salone non hanno reagito, invece un po' più avanti noi nell'ambito delle nostre newsletter ne abbiamo mandata una alla capo-redattrice di Wallpaper che conoscevamo da altre fiere cui avevamo partecipato, alcuni giorni dopo aver mandato questa newsletter hanno reagito che volevano il pezzo. Quindi è uno strano mondo, perché Droog sono famosi e devono avere un grande network e fanno tanto per la PR, però queste cose hanno dinamiche strane. Contano anche spesso i contatti personali, chi fa click con chi, chi comunica con chi. E questo lo vedo continuamente in un certo senso.

[0:28:00]

GI: Voi vi reputate bravi a gestire questo network?

MM: No, assolutamente no. A me piace tuffarmi nelle cose, fare ricerca, studiare, stare chiuso in studio. Ma questa è una cosa che ad oggi non puoi fare più, semplicemente non funziona. A questo punto per forza di cose impari come fare, impari a relazionare, che poi non è neanche una cosa difficile. Conta essere aperti, raccontare a chiunque incontri la tua storia, nient'altro.

GI: Cosa rappresenta questo premio di Wallpaper per voi, in senso ampio?

MM: In un certo senso è un bel riconoscimento perché loro guardano tante cose e poi selezionano.

[0:29:51]

Poi con più cinismo e scetticismo dici "vabbè a quella persona lì è piaciuto quello più di quell'altro", non è che ci sia stata una valutazione critica e oggettiva. Anche se sono comunque persone esperte ed una certa critica in qualche modo c'è. Dal punto di vista economico invece, la questione è che il pubblico di una testata come Wallpaper è diverso dal pubblico di Basilea. Per cui magari tante persone che leggono Wallpaper ti vorrebbero contattare, però sei fuori dal loro mercato. C'è un oggetto che abbiamo fatto all'inizio che è il tostapane con il piatto di Delft, quello è l'oggetto che ci perseguita. Perché non siamo mai riusciti a produrlo, le aziende lo trovano come un oggetto troppo di nicchia e l'investimento è abbastanza notevole perché avrebbe bisogno di stampi di metallo, ci sarebbe svariate migliaia di euro di investimento. Quindi l'oggetto non è mai stato prodotto.

[0:30:00]

Fino ad oggi abbiamo ricevuto migliaia di e-mail, telefonate, gente che viene a suonare alla porta, particolarmente prima di Natale, che vorrebbero avere questo oggetto. Viene percepito come un oggetto da regalo, non da utilizzare tutti i giorni, magari da usare di domenica con i parenti o per una colazione romantica. Chi legge queste testate, non è alla ricerca di una considerazione critica o di un oggetto critico, ma piuttosto di uno sfizio.

[0:32:00]

GI: C'è una discrepanza tra oggetto, rivista e possibile acquirente?

MM: Può sicuramente esserci. Perché non è che ci sia sempre una riflessione critica.

GI: Alcuni progetti a volte finiscono su riviste di massa, raggiungendo un pubblico ampio, poi però tra l'immagine e l'oggetto c'è una distanza enorme.

MM: Questo per mia esperienza succede continuamente.

Ora c'era Oranienbaum, che è il castello olandese in Germania che hanno rinnovato e hanno fatto una mostra di design dove hanno messo tutte opere di design importanti, tra cui Hella Jongerius, mi è capitato di vederlo su un settimanale di massa tipo l'Espresso, e c'era una frase tipo "porcellana della designer Olandese, alla designer piace usare forme passate", fine. E' giusto, però non dice niente.

[0:34:00]

GI: Il contesto dove c'è più pertinenza tra gli oggetti e il pubblico è Basilea?

MM: Dipende sempre dall'oggetto.

[0:35:30]

Adesso anche a Milano ci sono gallerie che fanno mostre di oggetti limitati e di valore. Poi dipende dalla comunicazione diretta tra il pubblico e la galleria.

[0:36:00]

A Basilea le gallerie invitano certi clienti, a Milano le aziende invitano certi clienti, in un Museo all'opening ci vanno determinate persone. Il match ci deve essere già da prima, è una questione di network.

GI: Questo network arriva da te o da queste istituzioni?

MM: Sono le istituzioni che si prendono cura del network e che poi viene integrato ovviamente dalle nostre proposte di persone che magari abbiamo conosciuto prima e sappiamo essere interessati.

GI: E' un lavoraccio

MM: Certo. Ma nel momento che la cosa è curata, allora forse c'è la percezione maggiore di match. Forse la forma ideale è una sorta di simposio, dove c'è un tema chiaro, una presentazione chiara e un pubblico chiaro dove si sa più o meno chi va. Ovviamente l'opening di una mostra è più paragonabile al simposio.

[0:37:41]

Per me la cosa più interessante alla fiera è spesso anche l'opinione priva di pregiudizio ed esperienza di chi ci capita per caso e ti dà delle riflessioni del pezzo che tu non avevi mai fatto o che qualcuno nell'industria mai farebbe.

[0:38:00]

E' un'occasione di avere un contatto molto diretto.

GI: Credi che gli oggetti di Minale Maeda con maggiore visibilità abbiano un impatto su tutto il resto?

MM: Sicuramente. Chiamiamolo valore di attenzione, che poi non necessariamente si riflette nelle vendite. Ne parlavamo a Milano, dove abbiamo esibito da Rossana Orlandi e c'era Nacho e altri designer. Spesso non sono i designer più in vista quelli a vendere di più.

[0:39:41][0:39:41]

Perché alla fine il mettersi in vista costa anche tanti soldi, perché devi fare la mostra, devi fare il pezzo prominente e tutte queste cose qua. Poi in seguito se tutto va bene hai generato una certa attenzione che a sua volta ti porta vendite, nuovi progetti, etc...

[0:40:00]

Pero' una volta che questo è successo, ci sono dei designer che sono fuori dai media, come può essere in questo momento Tomas Libertiny, che ha avuto un boom e adesso si sente piuttosto poco, però lui dietro le scene ha il suo giro di contatti e di commissioni, ed in qualche modo gli vanno bene le cose. Quindi sì i media sono importanti, generano attenzione, adesso se questa attenzione si traduce effettivamente in business, non intendo business come arricchirsi a nostro livello a parte poche eccezioni, business vuol semplicemente dire, potersi permettere di fare il prossimo progetto e questo vuol dire poter continuare a ricercare il proprio tema... quand'è che l'attenzione si traduce in business?

GI: E' ciò che sto cercando di capire.

[0:42:00]

MM: Può esserci un mismatch di progetto: se tu fai un progetto con contenuto altamente teorico, poi ha una bella immagine e viene distribuito, genera attenzione nei media, però direttamente il progetto è impossibile venderlo perché è troppo dispendioso, oppure non ne puoi fare più di tanti. Allora a volte si pensa di fare un progetto proprio tagliato sull'evento, tipo per Milano cerchi di fare una cosa che potresti realizzare in auto-produzione perché sai che le persone potrebbero volerlo comprare... oppure c'è l'altro discorso di cercare di fare qualcosa molto striking, perché l'attenzione potrebbe generare l'interesse dell'industria, se tu hai un certo

nome puoi essere interessante perché loro semplicemente hanno un progetto firmato da te e questo garantisce attenzione. Però stranamente questa trasformazione succede anche poco. I progetti che generano attenzione sono oggetti che non sono facili da commercializzare. Mentre invece ci sono designer che generano relativamente poca attenzione come Silvain Villains [43:44] o anche Studio Big Game che però producono molto bene progetti vendibili da Established and Sons o Calimoco

Poi ci sono anche i Konstantin Grcic che fa degli oggetti assolutamente pratici, non necessariamente fuori di testa, come può essere un progetto di Jurgen Bey che è molto stravagante, molto particolare, molto interessante...

[0:44:00]

GI: Tu stai insegnando?

MM: Sì a Eindhoven, come guest teacher, vado un paio di volte all'anno.

GI: Ecco, nei contesti scolastici, credi che il media profile conti?

MM: Conta perché gli studenti, che sanno ancora poco di come funziona il mercato, e di quali sono le dinamiche, sono molto presi dai nomi famosi, perché possono dire ho studiato con Questo, oppure cercano subito di avere un internship.

[0:44:35]

La stessa problematica si trova nell'internet. Ci sono dei siti che generano un sacco di attenzione, ma poi questa attenzione come si traduce? In cosa? Per esempio Facebook ha un sacco di clienti, però nessuno paga niente, sì c'è l'advertisement e così via. Oppure c'è YouTube, ma all'inizio non guadagnavano niente... in un certo senso lo trovo paragonabile. Anderson diceva che è l'economia dell'attenzione, che tante persone vengono sul sito a vedere il tuo progetto, questo è una valuta però non sappiamo ancora come tradurre questa cosa in che cosa.

[0:46:00]



FRIDAY, 9TH MARCH 2012 - DROOG OFFICE, AMSTERDAM

## Transcript Marielle Janmaat (Droog Design)

■ visibility

■ autonomy

■ reputation

■ financial value

■ personal reward

Marielle Janmaat: Hi, My name is Marielle Janmaat, I work for Droog Design since about ten years and my main part of the business is related to products in general. So I talk to all the designers, from the starting point, I care of all the financial aspects, legal aspects, production, prototyping, and the all process...

Giovanni Innella: It's a lot of management both on the content and development of the products

MJ: Yes

GI: Were you involved in the project, Dusk Dawn Mirror?

[0:02:00]

MJ: Yes

GI: What was your role in this project?

[0:02:12]

MJ: We exhibited this piece for the first time in Art Basel Miami, in Basel. It was something, which was done by our American department. We asked Mario Minale to work on few pieces, and this was one of those. We did a project with him in Milan we presented their mirror in a project called saved by Droog and this was a mirror which was already produced and we bought it on an auction because the company who owned this series of mirrors went out of business. Mario and Kuniko came up with this idea to add this gradient layer over the existing mirror and then they really loved the idea and they wanted to take it few steps further especially on a quality level and they designed this high high high quality piece.

GI: So there is a conceptual background, which developed one product, and then it has been developed further.

[0:04:00]

MJ: Yes, maybe they already had this idea, because of course working with gradients was probably something they were already thinking about or working on. But in this piece they could really go to the best producers in the world and go for the highest quality you can get in mirroring glass.

GI: You actually just mentioned two of the main events of the year: the Furniture Fair of Milan and then Art Basel Miami. How important are those venues for Droog?

MJ: Art Basel Miami is basically a type of fair which is hooked or connected to the art fair and the art is really the core business of the all fair and design of course has been rocketed in the last 15 years to the art level and to the art exposure in general. I think for Droog is not the place to be, because is a different game, there are extremely expensive pieces; it's like the art world.

[0:05:39]

Small galleries who have private clients and you really need to be in that world to know how to get your clients buying your stuff and that's not what Droog is about. That's my opinion.

GI: What about Milan, instead?

[0:06:00]

MJ Milan of course is always the place where you can show the thoughts you have generated or created for the future. If we don't have anything to say we will not go to Milan. But so far, every year, we had something to say. This year is the 20th time Droog exhibits in Milan.

GI: So if we go back to your relationship with Minale Maeda, how did you get to know about them? When did the relationship start?

[0:06:50]

MJ: First time I met them, it was really funny and nice: they were students. They were doing the masters at the Design Academy Eindhoven and we did a project lead by Jurgen Bey, but Droog was facilitating the location in Amsterdam. They had to come to Amsterdam and do their workshop for several days and they had to present in our space, not where we are right now, but not far from here. Kuniko and Mario were in the same class. I remember they were very stressed, they run out of time, they had to stay longer in the office and I said “no it’s ok, you can stay as long as you want” and that was the first time I met them. I really liked them from day 1, but I didn’t know the quality of their work.

[0:08:00]

During the years they started working together more closely. The first project we presented from Mario, I think it was the Lego chair in 2004.

GI: That was his thesis I think

MJ: Yes. I’m not sure they were master students

GI: I think so

MJ: It must have been. Because Kuniko studies in Japan and Mario studied in Germany

GI: Why did you choose them for this commission?

MJ: It started with a piece which was... he made the Lego chair, which was his thesis. My colleague of New York came up with this idea: “maybe he can do something with the Rietveld Buffet”, the cabinet. Especially for the big fair in Basel, which was a wonderful idea of course.

[0:09:22] P

At the same time they were also working on this, they presented it to us basically, because the quality of this piece is so high and also the costs to make it, we decided this could be a beautiful piece to show in Basel too. And it turned out to be a fantastic mirror. If you look at the pictures, it’s already beautiful, but if you stand in front of it you really get lost in this world, which is shown behind the mirror.

GI: It’s a pity that is actually on magazines, or on the pictures that we experience this piece more than in real. What about the brief, did you hand in a brief to them?

[0:10:00]

MJ: In this case no. It was coming from them, because this was the next step of the first project where they experienced the gradients and how to apply it. It was very difficult to make. If you have a mirror, and you add a layer which gives this beautiful effect... But we never gave up, we found now, after more than one year, a producer that can probably do it. And now it’s very difficult to find the right mirrors. But that’s not for this piece.

GI: Are you developing something else?

MJ: No, it was for the saved by Droog.

GI: So the mirrors for Saved by Droog were all made by Minale Maeda or they outsourced people?

MJ: No, we did that. We helped them. And in this case they did it themselves.

GI: The first brief, the one for Saved by Droog, that one was coming from Droog?

MJ: Yes

GI: Have you ever adapted it for Minale Maeda once identified them as possible designers?

[0:12:00]

MJ: No, for Milan “Saved by Droog” we had the brief and we had a pool of products, because it was based on already existing products. So when we came up with the idea – Renny generated the idea – we presented the all package to a group of designers, which was selected of course. We selected Minale Maeda, because we thought they could work with already existing pieces. It’s not for everybody of course: not all the designers are able or willing to work with already existing pieces and it’s because of the mix of those two people Kuniko and Mario. Because they have very different angles I think and that’s why they are such a strong couple and they always go for high quality and that’s something very important if you want to make a new piece out of an already existing product to prevent that it looks like a Do It Yourself

GI: A cheaper version of the original

MJ: Yeah

GI: So it’s a work of curation of designers rather than curation of products. This is what you do at Droog, you select designers ad-hoc for the projects.

MJ: Yeah

GI: Do you remember any relevant media reports about this project? Any article that was particularly important? or some media that featured this product?

MJ: What was really nice is that it was selected and awarded by Wallpaper. It won a prize! It was selected as the most important I can’t remember what was the category, but I can look it up for you.

[0:14:00]

It was awarded as top design in 2011, by Wallpaper.

GI: And the credit was shared equally between Minale Maeda and Droog?

MJ: Yes

GI: So if you have to say what Droog offered to Minale Maeda in this project, how would you describe that. What did you offer them?

MJ: What do you mean by offering?

GI: What resources or services did you offer? I can imagine there was an economic trade, but you probably also offered some services to them.

[0:14:51]

MJ: We helped them for instance with the concrete casting. We always try to think together with the designer. We don’t only say: “this is your commission and we want you to deliver now, can you show us the prototypes, etcetera”. No. We always try to assist them, more or less, to search and source manufacturers. It’s really like co-working, instead of commissioning and expecting the designers to deliver by themselves, no we always want to work really closely together. Although in this case with Mario and Kuniko, they are so good in finding out exactly how a production process goes.

[0:16:00]

So if they tell us “this is possible or not”, most of the time I believe them. But sometimes we can also come up with a new way to look at the design and change it into something, which is more realistic or more functional or more beautiful...

GI: So this assistance that you mentioned, it’s in the development of the products, but what about in the circulation of the representation of the product. For example in the photo shooting or in the exhibition, what is the role of Droog in that?

MJ: Most of the time it’s us who decides how we want to publish it. We normally do the



photo shoots ourselves. Not always, because of time pressure. That's always a problem. We try to communicate with the designers how we are going to present something and where. Also if it's published somewhere we try to inform them as much as possible. That's something we always do from the first day. We always mention the names of the designers. There is always the title of the product, designed by blah blah blah and then there is Droog. So Droog is the label, but the product is always connected with the designers. We always publish the bios of the designers on our website and on press releases with images.

[0:18:00]

So those two things are connected. It's very important for us that we communicate that.

GI: Correct me if I'm wrong, Droog offers a platform for the designers to be visible and credited correctly and to progress in their career?

[0:18:24]

MJ: Yes. But I wouldn't say a platform, because that's something hunting us from day 1. People think that you can become a member of Droog, but that's not the case; we are a brand. We decide whom we want to work with and it's always based on the products, the quality of the products and if a designer fits in a certain project. What I've already said is that for instance in Saved by Droog we thought of those designers that could really work with already existing materials. It's Droog doing the art direction of the presentations and projects, basically.

[0:19:27] [0:19:27]

Of course you can say it's good for the designers because we create a platform or a window, which is different from when they do it themselves because Droog has a certain visibility, it's well known and also people have a certain expectation of what we are going to show. So it's already like a few steps before the group. A lot of people can't do those things by themselves.

GI: My next question is: Droog has helped many designers in being put on the global design map and I wanted to know how the relationship with these designers evolve as their media-profile grows? Do you keep in touch with them?

MJ: Sometimes is difficult and it differs from which era they are from. For instance the people who started it in 1993 together with Droog - or Droog started with them - some of them are world famous. Like Hella Jongerius, Marcel Wanders, Jurgen Bey, Richard Hutten, Piet Hein Eek, if you look at the progression Hella Jongerius made or Marcel Wanders and Piet Hein Eek...

[0:22:00]

Piet Hein Eek for instance decided I think four years ago to expand abroad and show his work more.

GI: To expose himself

MJ: Yes, to expose himself. And if you look at Marcel Wanders, he did it completely differently. It's really up to the person, of course. And it's really only for a few people to make those kind of big steps in their careers. I heard so many times designers saying - especially the ones of the early days - "Why do I still have to teach if I'm a designer?" And I tell them it's only for a few people that you can only live from what you are designing. You really need to be more than just a good designer. You have to be a very strong personality or you have to be an entrepreneur.

GI: You have to be able to stand under the spotlight

MJ: For sure, it's not for everybody. And for the younger generation, they were educated in such a different way and they live in a different world for instance. Because of the Internet the world changed, big time for everybody. But also for designers because suddenly they had access to the world, but also the world has access to them. So you really saw a big shift: the person behind the design was becoming more and more important and some of the designers went sky-high from day one.

[0:24:00]

Joris Laarman and De Makersvan, they were instantly big stars on the media. And it was all because of the media. I remember when we presented Joris Laarman's heatwave radiator, first time we were in Milan; he had like 65 interviews with big magazines from all over the world. There was this Japanese camera team following him around and he was just a graduate from Design Academy.

GI: How does the visibility of certain products impact Droog. I'll make an example; if I go downstairs I see a number of very famous pieces, but also a number of less well-known ones. How is important for Droog to have both typologies?

MJ: It's a quite difficult question, because I think I always love them. For me it's not important whether is famous or not, if I love them. Of course this is related to the other work done by the designer.

[0:26:00]

We work a lot with very young designers and you never know how their career will grow and what will be their next step and their next progress so that's always the big question: how will they develop? And sometimes they develop into really big stars or good designers, sometimes you never hear back from them.

GI: Have you ever commissioned or avoided a designer because he was very popular in that moment?

MJ: It's always difficult to say whether it's the way designers were perceived in media or it's our own experience. If we do a project there are always more than one designer involved. So you always have to guess if it will be a match or not. Because if you are going to do a project where there is always money involved and it turns out that the designers can't work together, then don't do it! Don't waste your money and energy.

[0:28:00]

Of course sometimes we said no to certain persons because of whatever reason, because they are too famous or they are connected to certain brands or their work progress in certain ways that we thought "not for us now". It really depends because we do so many different kinds of projects, but we always look at everybody.

GI: When you say: "we look at everybody", is it through design magazines, you attend design events, you have connections with schools?

MJ: Everything. But especially because of Internet is so easy. If we hear a name, I tell everybody to use Google to find them and we find them. That's so easy.

GI: What happened to these pieces? Where are they physically?

[0:29:12]

MJ: One of them is in our gallery. Don't forget to look at it and experience the beauty of it.

[0:29:27]

I remember when it was exhibited in Basel people came back. They were all these fancy people. Some of them came back with their husbands or wives and they were standing together and looking and looking and looking.

[0:30:00]

It's really beautiful, but unfortunately is quite expensive, that's a pity. I think we sold one or two. It's a small edition. But they are not all produced. They are produced on demand.

GI: Does Minal Maeda have one of these?

MJ: Yes I think so. It's one in which the casting didn't go very well. We always give a certain quantity of the products to the designers for their own files and their own use.

GI: In this moment you don't have any on loan to exhibitions?

MJ: No

GI: Is it usual of Droog to have pieces on loan?

[0:31:00]

MJ: Yes. For instance the saved by Droog mirrors they just came back from Poland, they were in a big exhibition and that exhibition will probably go to Qatar. We are still doing exhibitions.

[0:31:20]

We started to do more than few years ago.

GI: Is this circulation of pieces good for you?

MJ: Yes. It's because a lot of the projects we did in the last few years, the outcome was new business models, new ways, and new structures, not only products. That's something we really want to tell the world that we have these new models to work with instead of the traditional way product design goes.

[0:32:00]

GI: It's probably hard to make them circulate, when you have a business model to show instead of a new product.

MJ: Yes.

GI: I think that's all.

MJ: What is maybe worth mentioning is that if you look at the history of Droog it started as a foundation, a new movement that was not intentionally the reason to start, but it turned out to be that. So the content was always the most important part: the theory, the written part, of course also the products, the pictures of the products,

[0:34:00]

but 20 years ago content was more important than images or pictures. Now shifting through decades, visuals are the most important part and if you want to reach out to a group of people, you really have to be aware of the way you communicate. For Droog to evolve from a completely content driven, completely black and white text driven way of communication, towards a more modern XXI century way of communicating was a quite big process. That's also a process that went parallel with the brand, because it was first a foundation and now it's of course still a foundation but it's also a brand. Everybody knows Droog at least in the design world, but we want that more people know about Droog, not about the content and all the concepts behind the products, because a lot of people are not interested. Why should you try to talk to somebody that is not interested in your topic? So change it! We know that our products are high quality, because of all the layering, but not everybody needs to see all those layers. If they just like the products, then please buy it! That's a very important part, why Droog is still able to maintain the high quality and the level of the brand, because we realize that we have to talk in a different tone of voice. That's what we are doing. We are really trying those different parts of the company going parallel, but staying on the same level of quality. It's always a quality thing. It's very important.

GI: Would you say that the network of Droog has changed through the years? Do you need more exhibition designers, or photographers? Preparing and sending press releases has become a more demanding activity?

MJ: No, it's not more demanding. It's much easier than few years ago. That's also because of the computers and technology. Everybody can take a beautiful picture nowadays. But it's also the reason why you need to talk in a different tone of voice. Because everybody can do the same, everybody can make a picture of a beautiful product. Why would you go to a fair if you can already find it on the Internet? Look at fashion. 20 years ago nobody had access to the latest collection. And now it's already online, everybody knows what's going to be in the stores for the next winter. Everything is accessible now.

*FOLLOW-UP EMAIL, FRIDAY 16TH MARCH 2012*

GI: What does this award mean for Droog?

MJ: It gives the droog brand status because it is a quality label. We are proud to get an award like this. Our sales rep. used the logo for his e-mail signature ( see attachment ) It also helps to tell the world droog is a brand and not a platform.

[mail 1] [mail 1]

GI: Why do you think a strong personality is required for being a successful designer these days?

[mail 2]

MJ: You need to present yourself and communicate directly, you can't just sit in your studio and design. You have to build your own brand name. and with a strong personality it is just easier to stand out between people in general.

GI: Does the development of a designer – like if he becomes famous – affect the sales of his previous pieces?

[mail 3] [mail 3]  
[mail 3]

MJ: Probably. It depends on the type of products of course. But in general a bigger group of people will buy products of famous people.

# **APPENDIX V: INTERVIEWS CASE STUDY 4**

TUESDAY, 15TH MAY 2012 - JONGERIUSLAB, BERLIN

# Transcript Hella Jongerius

■ visibility

■ autonomy

■ reputation

■ financial value

■ personal reward

Giovanni Innella: What I look at is the relationship between media and design...

Hella Jongerius: That's why I don't want to be in the picture

GI: Are you a rebel of this industry? The media industry?

HJ: I know the media industry very well.

GI: You have experienced the growth of the media industry in design...

HJ: Well, at the start design magazines... at that time we only had Domus, Interni and in Holland a few, but it was more for consumers like Elle Decoration and this kind of stuff. And that was it. You had I think one German and one English... What was the name of the English one?... I don't think it's existing anymore, but anyway it was not a lot. Also the Newspaper were always there, also in the beginning, New York Times... But it was not a lot...

GI: Were you already used to Press Releases for example?

HJ: For myself?

GI: Yeah...

HJ: No, of course... I was just graduated

GI: When did you start understanding that you had to develop that side?

HJ: I think when I left Droog design. I think in '99, something like that. I understood that I can drive my own car in the media. I understood that I was no longer victim, but a player instead.

GI: Do you think Droog was covering that part, the relationship with the media, so you were somehow protected?

HJ: No, it's not that they were in charge, but I know I was also not independent. I couldn't play my own game in the media. And as soon as I was free from them. It was not a click like this. I think in the years 2000-2003 I knew for instance this product needs that media attention, in order to really make a strategy for products.

GI: Do you think this is something you also offer to your clients, something they are aware of?

HJ: Of course! They know that that's in the package. If you ask to a designer with a stature, then you know you'll get a lot of media attention. In a way you buy the advertisement with asking to a good designer or a star designer. You receive exposure. I also tell customers, not at the start... If a product is ending and we talk with the media, what to do, sometimes they are a bit naïve or they have a media department then I tell them "Don't do it" and I tell them what kind of strategy to do and also, sometimes they don't want to use my name, or they want to use my name, or only the name and not the one of the product... so all this media... it's a large theme in the making.

[0:02:00]

[0:04:00] [0:04:00]

[0:05:12]

GI: Does it take a lot of energy from you? The crediting part for example?

HJ: Yeah... that's always... We made a principle rule, so it's always JongeriusLab, slash Hella Jongerius and then the ones who worked with me. But if you work for larger companies, they only want my name on it, so not Lab. SO it's only Hella Jongerius. They don't want a lot of names, because that doesn't sell.

GI: Do they love individuals, rather than a lab?

[0:06:00]

HJ: Yeah

GI: I was thinking that we could use some references for our conversation. Initially I was thinking of the table for HSBC, but your assistant told me that that's not a project you particularly want to talk about. So I was thinking of the vases you did for Misfit...

HJ: For Phaidon

GI: There you go! I was about to ask: who do you identify as the commissioner, Phaidon, Makkum...

HJ: The commissioner is Phaidon.

GI: Who else was involved in the project? You, Phaidon...

HJ: And Makkum

GI: What about KT Colour?

HJ: They were not involved, because it's about glazing and they don't do glaze. The recipe is from Makkum. KT was not involved.

GI: You exhibited at Boijman, right?

HJ: Yes

GI: Was that already in the brief? When designing the vases, did you know that they would have been exhibited there?

HJ: The idea was like this: Phaidon wanted to make a book with me. And they said "we believe that a solo book for a solo designer is not working anymore. We need something else. We need also a product with it and then we'll make a special edition and this special edition will sell. And this could be the business model for the normal book". I said OK. I was not very keen on doing just a stupid thing, just to sell a book. So I wanted to take it as an opportunity to develop something that I would never develop on my own, as there was a little money of course.

[0:07:46]

Then I thought: "I want to do with Makkum this colour recipes for a long time".

So I called Makkum I said: "Listen, I would like to do this colour investigation with you, this research. Are you interested?"

[0:08:00]

They said Yes, let's do the normal vase, because we have it already, it's only an idea on recipes. Then I called Phaidon, I said: "I got a great idea, it's a research program I wanted to do for a long time. Each item that comes out is a one-off because it's this recipe on this vase, so it's totally covering my whole idea of a good product. So it's not just an excuse to sell something, so for me it was super, for Makkum was great and for Phaidon was great.

[0:08:44]

And then we sold it through the book, but I had my research for free.

GI: Is this network your invention? You made those connections?

HJ: Of course

GI: Do you have to do that often?

HJ: Often, yes. I always like that not only the product is this round puzzle, but that also the alliances, that there is a good co-operation between a lots of people. And many times I can't make the puzzle right and then I don't do the project. It's an important part. I got a lot of pressure from Museums to do something and then I try to make alliances with companies or with the research and then there is no money or he doesn't want... if it's not a round thing, I'm not going to do it.

GI: You are an entrepreneur in some ways...

HJ: Sure, I'm an entrepreneur.

[0:10:00]

GI: Does it happen often that the project is sparked by a mediated context like a book or an article or a design event. Does it happen often that in contacting you they say "Hella, there is a furniture fair, or there is this book, would you start something for that?"

HJ: Yes, but I always say no. Unless I find a way so that I can research with other one's money, that's a good one. Or that I can do something for a museum that can become an industrial product, that's also a good one. So you know I always try to make a few steps. Doing things for a fair, I'm not interested... it's just an advertisement for a stupid fair and I'm not interested in that. Find your own content and make your own content by what you do in the fair, but don't ask me to deliver content.

GI: So, going back to the vases. Those vases exist as a product, they exist as the content of a book, and they exist as an installation as well. Did you have all this in mind when you were designing?

HJ: Nooo. Oh, when I designed this... Yes! Of course!

GI: Were you concerned about how it would have looked on the book or how it would have been in the house of somebody or in the exhibition?

HJ: Yeah, but that's only one question: "Is it a good product?" Yes, and then it fits everywhere.

GI: But you were really interested in the research part of this product?

[0:11:40]

HJ: I could also come only with the recipes and then you had only a tile with the colour or a plate... no... it's also part of the same game that you also come with a good physical piece.

GI: Is there any media report that you remember about your project that you are particularly proud of. Or some that instead disappointed you.

[0:12:20]

HJ: Well... I'm very precise in media. So we never do one-page things, because it's a stupid principle. We only do it around a new product. So let's say if a magazine calls us now and they say: "We would like to do something", then we say

[0:13:07]

"Oh we have in October something new, can you come back in September?" So we are rigorous of the media. If there is a new product we make a little list, which magazines is good, which one we haven't been there for a long time, so we call them and we say "we have something, are you interested?" and they are always interested. So that's easy.

[0:13:43][0:13:43]

And we are very aware of the photography so if they do a large article like 6-8 pages or something, then they are allowed to come by because it takes a day.

[0:14:00]

If they come by it takes one full day of work from me and for the all studio to clean it up...



[0:14:12] GI: You talk about all these phases almost like a production process...

HJ: Yes, it is. It's one thing in my agenda: Press. If the project is ending, there is an end result. But the last result is the press.

[0:14:38] GI: Consequentially, do you think of the readers as somehow consumers of that product?

HJ: I think of exposure. I'm not thinking of the people who are reading it. I think this message has to be in the world and at the right time, in the right magazine, with the right context, the right interviewer. Sometimes it's not working. Sometimes they are not reacting.

[0:15:15] And what is more difficult for us, it's if there is a big company behind it then they don't want it, because it feels like advertisement for the media.

[0:15:25] So if you do KLM, immediately they are more hesitating, because it's an advertisement.

[0:15:31] And as soon as I do it on my own, then suddenly I'm not an entrepreneur, though that's advertisement for me... but because I have this cultural allure around me, it's not an advertisement and I'm free...

[0:16:00] I'm not free... but I have a voice... but as soon as there is a big company involved...

[0:16:04] but it's strange because Vitra they all like.

GI: It's design friendly?

HJ: Yes. So they have some hierarchy in their heads.

[0:16:21] So Vitra is ok, and the first time I did something for IKEA it was nice, the second time not anymore. It was an advertisement. KLM is advertisement.

[0:16:31] Phaidon, there is also not a good smell around Phaidon. And that's something that we know and that we work with.

GI: Is it a bit like making a recipe: so there is Phaidon that is not very design friendly, but then if you put Makkum and then you add Boijman?

HJ: No. It's not like I start by thinking Phaidon has a bad name, so I need a good... no... that's not how it works. Phaidon wants to make something and then I make a nice project out of it, for myself in the first place.

[0:17:15] It's a research with their money. A research that I wanted to do for a long time. It is loaded with content and interesting stuff, and then when it starts to go to the media,

[0:17:45] I recognize that Phaidon is not an animal that everybody eats. So then I know. But because it was a great project, and Boijman was there...

[0:18:00] GI: Do you try present it a bit differently, so that...

HJ: Well it doesn't need to be differently presented, because it is what it is. It's a group of vases with a nice research on colour. I didn't have to fake something there. That doesn't work: the faking in the media. They are smart. It's more that we know, in a way we are really press experts. I know how they work. And I think that in the last three years everybody wants to have a film and a video. Everybody. Normal interviews are not the case anymore, everybody wants to film. I'm very critical about it; I don't want to have my face everywhere, talking about nothing or something good. Also with the press we say 80% no, we do only a few that we want for ourselves. And for videos we say always no. Because it's such a demanding industry, I find it more demanding than words. I don't like.

GI: And the photo shooting is something that you do in the studio? Or you outsource it? Or is it the client covering that part?

HJ: Most of the time the client, but magazines always want to have process and the atelier of the designer.

[0:20:00]

So then they come by with their own photo group and they start taking pictures. Most of the time they want the portraits and we have a lot of portraits in our stock that we bought, that we liked from people that came by. So most of the times we say listen we have a lot of portraits in stock, do you want one of these? Because for me I get very tired being a model. It's also for the film, for my face, I get so exhausted by those kind of activities, that's why we try to push that a bit away and stay more focused on products instead of me.

GI: Doing my studies I realize that there has been such a shift, if I tell you that Tom Dixon or Piet Hein Eek opened a restaurant it makes perfectly sense, but if I tell that the Eames opened a restaurant in the sixties we would be laughing, right? How do you think this shift happened? How can a designer now do entrepreneurial activities that are not related to their first profession?

[0:22:00]

HJ: Being an author and being a sellable identity, if you compare that to pop stars, no pop stars would have opened a restaurant... For myself I also think I can't do something like that.

GI: Do you think you would benefit from an activity like that?

HJ: Of course. But if I wanted to make money I could do a lot, but I don't do it, because I want to focus on my core interest. And that's research and design. So if I wanted to make money I would do totally other things, I'm not doing it for the money.

GI: Are you proposed by someone tempting you?

HJ: Oh yes, we receive many of those things. We received that we could have got for free a shop in one shopping centre in the middle of Dubai... but what do I have to do with a shop. I have no idea. I never thought that Piet Hein Eek would have made a restaurant; I don't think he is doing a restaurant. I think he is doing his own world and to get people there, because it's in the middle of nowhere, you have to give them a cup of coffee, otherwise they leave or they don't go. So it's an activity that is needed for your core business, and you want to have people over there. So I don't see it as a business model. I don't know where Tom Dixon has his place.

[0:24:00]

GI: It's in London, by the Dock. I haven't been there. I think you are describing it well, these are worlds in which restaurants are only part of it...

HJ: Yeah... Otherwise nobody comes. Also in Makkum, that's also far away, so you drive two hours from Amsterdam and you come in this place and then there is only a shop, so you walk by... It's only one hour, maybe... hopefully it's half an hour and you see everything. And if you can't sit down and have coffee and just think and chat, and have another look and maybe buy something... it's in the second round. You can just have an atmosphere around your day, to create an atmosphere around a visit; I think that helps a lot.

GI: What a difference from you pushing away people instead. You keep people outside it seems.

HJ: Yeah, I don't want people here. I have enough people around me.

GI: Is it because what you trade is much less physical, it's not about objects... While Piet Hein Eek is really selling and producing chairs - and so is Tom Dixon - You don't have the same trading.

HJ: I don't have a production system. But do I keep pushing people away? Because I want to do my job and

[0:26:00] my job is not talking to everybody.

GI: When I interview some of the commissioners, they tell me a designer now has to have a strong personality and stand next to the product and talk about the product, instead you say you do everything to avoid this part.

HJ: I think the product talks for itself.

GI: Yeah. At the same time somebody like Louise, she plays a role.

HJ: She is very important, she comes with the words and we have a constant dialogue about the work and about design in general. So of course, words are important, but to share them with the outside world, you know there are enough words already... You know I can talk my all life... I want to do something else...

GI: You credit Louise, she is not your ghost-writer, she is prominent... Is this collaboration something that you cherish, something that you value...

[0:27:27] HJ: Of course... very much so. I'm very lucky with that and thankful.

GI: Is she like a craftsman for you, like a manufacturer?

HJ: We just had a conversation this morning about it.

[0:28:00] I think I didn't have Louise, I think I would make the same. So it's not that I wouldn't be here, where I am right now. But with her words she guided me. She made the path bigger with the words.

GI: Does her writing somehow point at a direction to you, in some ways? Does she inspire you for the next work?

HJ: It's not for the next work. It's more like I make something and then she reacts on it, so it's more backwards.

GI: She doesn't have an impact on the next step.

HJ: Of course it has an impact. But I make myself the next step, each time and surprise her in doing the next step. And then she suggests a book, she comes with stories and words, with a larger context of what I'm doing and I'm very happy with that and it also enrich me and I'm lucky to have brains around me. That's a total luxury.

GI: You don't find that with other people in the media industry?

[0:30:00] HJ: No... there isn't a lot of those... there are a few.

TUESDAY, 25TH SEPTEMBER 2012 - PHAIDON OFFICE, LONDON

## Transcript Emilia Terragni (Phaidon)

■ visibility

■ autonomy

■ reputation

■ financial value

■ personal reward

Giovanni Innella: La prima domanda e' una breve introduzione.

Emilia Terragni: Adesso sono editorial director a Phaidon, dove commissiono libri di architettura, design e cucina e dirigo i dipartimenti che realizzano questi libri. Sono arrivata a Londra piu' di dieci anni fa come editor per il design, anzi Phaidon a quel tempo non aveva ancora iniziato a fare i libri di product design, quindi io che venivo dal Vitra design museum sono stata assunta per iniziare una collana di libri per il product design e poi di li' ho cominciato ad abbracciare anche altre discipline.

GI: Il tuo ruolo in Misfit?

ET: Dunque, noi avevamo fatto un primo libro con Hella Jongerius nel 2002 che era proprio all'inizio della sua carriera.

GI: La conversazione con Louise?

ET: Era la conversazione con Louise. Anzi Hella era nel nostro primo libro di product design che si chiamava Spoon, in cui avevamo chiesto a dieci critici del design di scegliere dieci promesse

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nell'ambito del product design e Hella Jongerius era una di questi 100 designer. Quel libro per me era stato importante perche' mi aveva dato un primo panorama di quello che succedeva nel mondo a livello di designer emergenti. Da quel libro ci sono stati una serie di designer con cui abbiamo iniziato a lavorare su delle monografie. I fratelli Bourrulec, Konstantin Grcic e Hella Jongerius. Quindi quel primo libro che era un libro abbastanza piccolo e solo con questa intervista e con pochi lavori perche' a quella data Hella aveva prodotto ancora abbastanza poco. Dopo quel primo libro siamo rimasti in contatto. Attorno al mondo del design c'e' questo gruppo abbastanza solido di amici, di persone che si guardano, si informano, lavorano insieme, anche se hanno dei modi di lavorare completamente diversi. Per cui ci siamo sempre un po' tenuti in contatto con Hella e l'altro campo in cui ci stavamo sviluppando era appunto quello delle edizioni limitate, fatte principalmente con fotografi e artisti. Con alcuni dei giovani artisti con cui lavoriamo, dei fotografi, abbiamo chiesto di realizzare delle stampe con soggetti che sono specifici per noi e quindi di vendere in edizione limitata una monografia con una stampa o una fotografia.

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Soprattutto nel momento in cui ci e' stato questo boom delle edizioni limitate nel design, abbiamo pensato che anche a livello del product design dovevamo fare qualcosa di simile. Questo e' dovuto anche al fatto che quando noi facciamo dei libri abbiamo dei rapporti molto stretti con i soggetti, che e' molto simile a commissionare un oggetto. Quindi abbiamo molti input, si discute molto sui contenuti, sulla veste grafica... siamo molto hands-on. Così' abbiamo pensato che sarebbe interessante poter fare delle scelte anche a livello di prodotto. Con Hella abbiamo cominciato a parlare dopo un po' di anni che abbiamo pubblicato il primo libro sul fatto che la sua produzione era molto cambiata, perche' nel frattempo lei aveva cominciato a lavorare con aziende come Vitra in cui c'e' chiaramente un modello industriale molto diverso da quello che faceva con Droog o con edizioni limitate. Abbiamo pensato che fosse il momento di fare un nuovo libro. Così' parlando e' venuta fuori quest'idea se ci fosse stato l'interesse da parte sua di produrre anche un oggetto che potesse accompagnare il libro. Lei stava in quel momento lavorando su questo nuovo vaso, Misfit, che a noi e' sembrato molto interessante perche' era un po' questa idea che era un vaso che faceva parte della sua formazione lavorativa,

[0:06:00]

perche' questo shape che lei usa in diversi modi. Pero' con questo nuovo modo di colorarlo che praticamente rendeva un'edizione di 300 pezzi in cui ciascun singolo pezzo era completamente diverso dall'altro. Perche' c'e' questa base di colori che a seconda di come vengono sovrapposti danno un risultato completamente diverso. Quindi mi piaceva molto quest'idea di avere un prodotto che e' in parte industriale, perche' la produzione del vaso in se' e' una produzione craft pero' e' uno stampo... pero' questo fatto che poi questi colori che lei applicava soprattutto in un momento in cui il suo lavoro era molto specifico sul colore. Ad esempio per Vitra cura molto tutto l'aspetto del colore e anche per altre collezioni, quindi stava facendo un lavoro che era molto pertinente. Così' abbiamo pensato che era una buona idea. Soprattutto questa idea che il libro e il vaso in qualche modo si corrispondevano,

GI: In effetti la parte del colore e' forse quella piu' difficile da rappresentare...

[0:07:34]

ET: E' quella piu' difficile da rappresentare, ma nel libro in maniera molto molto sottile, il libro e' organizzato per colore. Perche' si parte dal bianco e sfogliandolo così' si passa al verde, poi ci sono i gialli, i rossi e poi si finisce con i colori scuri. Che e' una cosa che non viene immediatamente identificata nel libro,

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pero' era il suo modo di organizzarlo. Quindi quest'idea del colore per lei e' estremamente importante. Quindi il libro non e' organizzato ne' per ordine cronologico, ne' per tipologia, e quindi il colore diventa una maniera per organizzarlo in questa idea del Misfit, per cui niente e' perfetto e niente e' set, ed e' come un'atmosfera che e' li' e che lei cerca in qualche modo di dare al lettore e chiunque lo prenda in mano. Anche questo binding del libro, su questo abbiamo avuto grandi discussioni perche' lei proprio lo voleva che sono tutti come diversi, non c'e' perfezione...

GI: Ma io so chi c'e' dietro questo libro...

[0:09:00]

ET: Irma Boom, e certo! Ma questa e' anche l'altra cosa importante perche' quando Hella mi ha detto appunto che voleva fare questo libro, mi ha detto che appunto lei voleva lavorare con Irma Boom. Io ho detto benissimo!

GI: Voi non avete mai lavorato con Irma Boom?

ET: Si abbiamo fatto quell'altro li', il libro sul design ed architettura olandese che si chiama False Flat. E comunque Irma e' una di queste persone, di questo circolo che ci gira attorno e abbiamo lavorato in un paio di libri e poi ci vediamo, ci scambiamo opinioni... Appunto Irma ha lavorato con Hella anche se non avevano mai lavorato insieme, abbiamo fatto una specie di esperimento.

[0:10:00]

Abbiamo provato questo binding che e' abbastanza nuovo. La cosa interessante e' che ci siamo aiutati a vicenda, perche' lei aveva questa idea di come farlo, ma non sapeva come realizzarlo. Lei pensava di farlo con le graffette e quindi avrebbe usato una carta molto piu' sottile perche' non sapeva come fare questo, e invece siamo stati noi che abbiamo proposto di fare questa cosa con il filo.

GI: E questo rientra nel vostro know how?

ET: Si, noi abbiamo una produzione... siccome facciamo spesso cose abbastanza radicali, per cui abbiamo un dipartimento nella produzione in cui noi poniamo il problema e poi si cerca di risolverlo. Anche la copertina per esempio, Irma voleva questa cosa dei colori che rimandano appunto al vaso, che sono questi colori sovrapposti e a secondo di come si sovrappongono cambia colore. Quello che Irma ci aveva chiesto era di mettere degli adesivi, fare una copertina bianca con degli adesivi che volendo si potevano togliere e a quel punto anche noi le abbiamo detto "bella idea, pero' ogni volta che uno li toglie cosa succede?" Perche' non troviamo qualcosa che si puo' riposizionare e che in effetti si riferisce ancora di piu' a come i vasi sono composti.

[0:12:00]

Così abbiamo provato quest'idea degli adesivi riposizionabili che semplicemente con un'azione elettrostatica rimangono sempre su. Io ricordo che da bambina avevo dei libri che funzionavano allo stesso modo per le figurine.

GI: C'è una rete strana: Phaidon chiede a Hella di fare un vaso, Hella lo fa con Makkum, parallelamente c'è Irma che fa un libro e Phaidon che fa il Makkum della situazione.

ET: Sì

GI: Se stessimo parlando di un libro convenzionale io non riuscirei ad identificare Phaidon come un committente.

ET: Invece, è sempre così. Questo è interessante perché il prodotto insieme al vaso rende più eclatante il ruolo di chi commissiona. Però in effetti noi vogliamo sempre definirci dei publishers e non dei printers. E questo è un po' il problema dell'editoria in cui i publishers stanno diventando tutti un po' dei printers. Perché non si vuole investire nella ricerca... fare un prodotto di questo tipo, ci vuole un sacco di tempo.

[0:14:00]

Ci vuole qualcuno che abbia voglia di pensare a qualcosa di diverso. La stessa cosa può succedere anche solo da un punto di vista di contenuti. Molti editori ricevono un manoscritto e lo pubblicano, perché è più semplice. Noi invece no, noi leggiamo riga per riga, cambiamo, diamo consigli e lavoriamo insieme per avere un prodotto migliore. Questa è un po' la nostra logica. Ed è interessante qui, perché qui si vede questa collaborazione stretta, ma nella maggior parte dei libri non è poi così evidente. E soprattutto c'è questo rapporto strettissimo con il designer che vuol dire andare a trovare nello studio, capire cosa fanno, andare a vedere cose insieme, tutte le volte che hanno una mostra tra un talk, andare, capire, scambiare opinioni... così si crea una situazione in cui poi si può agire in maniera proattiva. In questo caso il povero editor che ha lavorato su questo libro, praticamente c'erano, Irma, Louise, Hella, io e questo poveretto che era in mezzo a queste quattro donne... con idee diverse...

GI: E' un processo di design?

ET: Completamente. Ma per me è sempre così, tutti i libri che faccio. Alcuni sono più smooth...

[0:16:00]

Io, l'art director, la nostra produzione, abbiamo questa rete in cui la domanda è sempre "è questo il prodotto migliore che possiamo avere? È questo il prodotto giusto?" Ad esempio dal punto di vista della grafica, noi non abbiamo dei designer interni. Tutte le volte che facciamo un libro noi ci chiediamo "chi è nel mondo il designer che può fare questo libro nel modo migliore?" E poi magari questi qui ci dicono di no. Per esempio ho fatto il libro su Rietveld, io ho chiesto a Wim Crowel di fare la grafica, e lui me l'ha fatto. Perché volevo qualcuno che capisse la tipografia, poi tra l'altro ho anche scoperto che hanno lavorato insieme, che avesse una comprensione del soggetto molto profonda e questo è un po' il nostro modo di lavorare. In questo caso quando Hella mi ha detto voglio lavorare con Irma, mi sembrava perfetto perché è una combinazione che già capivo poteva arrivare a dei risultati difficili, e anche perché ci sono dei problemi di costi... ci sono due tipi di carta qua, e chiaramente quando loro suggeriscono delle carte sono sempre delle carte super expensive, per cui trovare qualcosa che ha lo stesso risultato, ma che è affordable... e anche perché un libro di questo tipo dobbiamo per forza stamparlo in Cina perché c'è un sacco di lavoro manuale che non possiamo fare in Europa.

[0:18:00]

Per cui trovare i corrispondenti di carte giapponesi, che potessero soddisfare loro e che noi potessimo affrontare, perché è un libro – questa è un'altra cosa che Hella assolutamente voleva – che non fosse un libro costoso.

GI: Quello è un contrasto enorme tra il soggetto e il libro. Il libro è un prodotto di massa a tiratura illimitata versus un'edizione di 300 vasi.

[0:18:42]

ET: Certo. 300 pezzi a dei costi alti, mentre il libro invece... la fabbricazione del vaso in se' non e' molto, ma la fabbricazione dei 3 glaze da Makkum ha dei costi piuttosto alti.

GI: La strategia commerciale rispetto ai prodotti l'avete fatta voi?

ET: Si l'abbiamo fatta insieme.

[0:19:12]

Praticamente abbiamo fatto due grandi eventi. C'e' stato la mostra di Hella al Boijmans e quello e' stato il primo, poi l'abbiamo presentato a Basilea al design Miami e poi l'abbiamo presentato a New York da Moss prima che chiudesse. E poi comunque abbiamo fatto un po' di campagna su internet.

[0:20:00]

Tra l'altro li abbiamo venduti anche meta' vengono venduti singoli e meta' vengono venduti come installazione, per cui c'e' un mercato tra il collezionista ed il museo.

GI: E questa strategia l'avete elaborata voi?

[0:20:12]

ET: Si, insieme. Anche insieme alla galleria Kreo. Anche li' perche appunto e' un network, per cui loro ci hanno passato parte dei clienti che normalmente comprano le cose di Hella...

[0:20:28]

Proprio una collaborazione molto stretta e appunto sapendo se Hella aveva una mostra o un talk, noi siamo sempre stati li'...

GI: C'e' un altro layer che ci eravamo dimenticati: questo vaso esiste come prodotto, come libro e come installazione.

ET: Si

GI: E questo si sapeva dall'inizio, che sarebbe esistito in queste tre forme?

[0:21:01]

ET: Si. Abbiamo chiesto a Hella quale era la strategia migliore perche' lei sicuramente conosce meglio il mercato, mentre per noi era piu' un esperimento. L'abbiamo deciso insieme perche' l'idea era che fossero o venduti singolarmente o un'installazione unica. Poi e' stato parlando che Hella in pratica parlava di questi vasi in termini di colore e allora le abbiamo chiesto se era possibile fare delle mini installazioni con 5 o 7 vasi che avessero un senso dal punto di vista dell'organizzazione cromatica e che lei ha proprio scelto

GI: Le installazioni sono quelle che vendete?

ET: Si meta' vengono venduti singolarmente e meta' vengono venduti in gruppo

[0:22:00]

GI: E questa installazione grande l'ha disegnata lei?

ET: Questa si l'ha disegnata lei. E la installa sempre lei.

GI: E la organizza lei? Cioe' a che punto arriva il coinvolgimento di Boijmans?

[0:22:25]

ET: Al Boijmans era una mostra sul suo lavoro che avrebbe avuto comunque. E il pezzo centrale della mostra era questa installazione che lei chiama "the wheel of colour". La maniera in cui vengono organizzati e' sempre quella, con la stessa sequenza di colori.

GI: C'era un qualche aspetto del brief che rappresentava l'identita' di Phaidon?

ET: No ci siamo semplicemente affidati alle sue mani

[0:23:09]

GI: Quanta autonomia le avete accordato?

ET: Totale

GI: Quando avete iniziato non sapevate che c'era questo vaso?

ET: No, abbiamo iniziato questo libro con l'idea che volevamo fare un libro con un oggetto. Però nel momento in cui lei mi ha mandato il primo bozzetto del libro che aveva già il vaso in copertina lei sapeva già che voleva fare il vaso. Praticamente la proposta è venuta insieme, il vaso e il libro insieme.

[0:23:18]

GI: Dal punto di vista commerciale qual'è la relazione tra libro e oggetti?

ET: Il libro è molto più semplice da vendere

[0:24:00]

GI: E' quello che fa volume?

ET: E' difficile da dire perché fa volume in termine di presenza, numero di copie vendute e lo stiamo già ristampando, però chiaramente dal punto di vista economico il vaso essendo molto più costoso... Per cui vendiamo molti più libri a basso prezzo, vendiamo meno vasi a prezzo alto

GI: Le due

ET: Per noi è importante che entrambi abbiano una vita lunga. Noi non vogliamo fare libri ogni anno o due anni.

GI: Il problema dei libri è che poi dopo un po' sono fuori stampa

[0:25:04]

ET: Noi li ristampiamo sempre. Ci sono pochissimi libri che noi non ristampiamo. Continuiamo a tenerli perché è un tale sforzo farli che è veramente da stupidi fare un libro che non ha una vita lunga. Noi non facciamo cataloghi. Questo poi è stato usato come catalogo alla mostra del Boijman ma non è un catalogo.

[0:25:33]

Infatti la parte centrale, che è la parte che io ho voluto, Hella non era proprio convinta, che è questo catalogo completo di tutto quello che lei ha fatto con anche tutte le informazioni, collezioni, quante... è una cosa utilissima per chi vuole studiare Hella o anche per chi vuole comprarlo ed è fatto da lei quindi è molto preciso, l'abbiamo controllato...

[0:26:00]

E questo da una dimensione al libro dal punto di vista dell'utilità. Quelli del museo non erano particolarmente interessati perché non tutti questi oggetti erano nella mostra, però per me lo era... E poi potrà non essere più up to date tra un paio d'anni però un libro così uno può anche fare un update. Oppure comunque noi continuiamo anche a vendere il libro così. Fanno parte di un'epoca diversa del suo lavoro. E soprattutto perché è così vicino a quello che lei fa, il libro che poi diventa una specie di suo prodotto. Il libro rispetta questo suo momento specifico in cui lei è molto interessata al Misfit, al colore e quindi fa parte di quello che fa.

GI: Dove sono i pezzi?

ET: Abbiamo diverse warehouses, sempre con Makkum abbiamo fatto questo packaging che abbiamo disegnato noi. C'è un'edizione speciale del libro che ha una copertina diversa e che viene col vaso.

[0:28:00]

Praticamente è la stessa cosa però la copertina è forata, e questa parte qua è inserito un foglio colorato che è il colore principale del vaso a cui è associato ed è firmato da Hella e numerato. Praticamente la scatola ha una specie di vassoio dove il libro viene contenuto

GI: Chi l'ha progettata?

ET: L'abbiamo fatto noi con Makkum. Makkum ha prodotto la scatola su disegno di Irma passato attraverso la nostra produzione. Irma ha fatto la grafica della scatola e noi abbiamo fatto la costruzione e Makkum ha fatto la produzione.

GI: I vasi li vendete tutti? C'è una Wheel of Colour che è una artist proof?



ET: No, no. Abbiamo fatto 5 prove d'artista che ci siamo divisi. Adesso non esiste piu' perche' parte li abbiamo venduti. La ruota intera non esiste piu' pero' esiste una replica che puo' essere venduta solo come installazione intera e questa e' quella che viene normalmente usata per musei e mostre.

GI: Questo che ruolo ha per Phaidon?

ET: Nessuno.

[0:30:00]

E' proprieta' di Hella, non puo' venderlo in pezzi singoli, puo' essere venduta come installazione ad un museo o data in loan.

GI: E voi non avete ricavi da questa.

ET: Noi non abbiamo nessun diritto da questo. La usiamo per promuovere.

GI: C'e' un accordo rispetto al crediting?

ET: Si

GI: La dicitura dice commissioned by Phaidon?

ET: Si. Il vaso si chiama Misfit e quando viene presentato viene presentato come "commissionato da noi" per accompagnare la monografia.

GI: Rispetto alla visibilita' del progetto per Phaidon quanto e' stato importante il progetto?

[0:31:12]

ET: E' stato importante perche' soprattutto a Basilea abbiamo ancora una volta confermato il nostro ruolo abbastanza radicale. Prima di tutto perche' lavoriamo in maniera molto intensa con i nostri soggetti, di promuoverli come vogliamo ed anche di avere questo ruolo in cui noi abbiamo dato ad Hella la possibilita' di fare qualcosa che lei non avrebbe potuto fare da sola e quindi un ruolo un po' di mecenate.

[0:32:00]

Lei era un po' di tempo che voleva fare questo vaso e non voleva farlo con una galleria, insomma non sapeva come farlo. Poi e' anche importante il venderli per lei, al di la' della parte economica, ma fare delle cose che poi la gente puo' avere. E quindi per noi e' stato importante perche' comunque e' stata un'operazione rischiosa e ci siamo buttati a capofitto.

GI: rispetto al sistema di royalties, esiste una royalty sul libro e sul vaso per Hella?

[0:32:45]

ET: Si. Con Makkum invece noi abbiamo pagato la produzione. Ci hanno fatto un preventivo e ci han detto quanto sarebbe costato. Noi dal punto di vista finanziario abbiamo sempre avuto a che fare con Hella e lei ha gestito il budget sia con gli scrittori che con il designer (Irma)

GI: Tra i progetti che avete fatto questo qui e' uno dei piu' visibili?

ET: Certamente questo e' quello piu'... un po' perche' aveva il vaso, un po' perche' ha questa grafica diversa... pero' ad esempio abbiamo appena finito un libro con i fratelli Bourullec il secondo, che e' un libro che pagina per pagina io sono stata seduta nel loro studio decidendo cosa mettere.

[0:34:00]

Meno visibile, pero'...

GI: Li' non c'e' un prodotto?

ET: No. Anche perche' e' un po' difficile questa cosa del prodotto. Secondo me con Hella era possibile perche' lei ha molto questa dimensione craft, invece i Bourullec sono pu'

industrial. Anzi secondo me loro sono meglio quando fanno industrial, anche se hanno fatto dei pezzi bellissimi. Però il libro è un loro prodotto, anche se in questo caso abbiamo scelto noi il designer, però la sequenza, i temi un po' tutto lo abbiamo fatto insieme.

GI: La scelta dei designer da pubblicare come viene fatta?

[0:35:08]

ET: Beh c'è abbastanza un pattern, abbiamo fatto i Bourullec, Naoto Fukasawa, Hella Jongerius, Konstantin Grcic, Yoshioka e Ross Lovegrove.

GI: E viene tutto deciso qui?

ET: sì.

GI: non ci sono agenzie che suggeriscono?

ET: No praticamente io suggerisco, un libro al mio editore e abbiamo questi meeting in cui discutiamo i progetti e poi vengono approvati, soprattutto per le monografie.

[0:36:00]

Cerchiamo di scegliere designer che non solo fanno cose interessanti però hanno anche qualcosa di interessante da dire. Ci sono un sacco di designer che fanno oggetti bellissimi però dal punto di vista del discorso sul design non è che ci sia un grande apporto. E poi ci sono quelli che già lavorano con altri editori e quindi non lavorano con noi. Però in genere c'è comunque la volontà di lavorare con noi perché c'è questo rapporto molto diretto e in cui curiamo molto e promuoviamo e abbiamo anche una grande distribuzione.

GI: Ovviamente il designer funziona un po' come veicolo di promozione, perché il designer intrattiene rapporti con i media o con i musei. Questo in qualche modo influisce sul successo del libro? Per esempio Hella Jongerius è una designer che sui media la vediamo spesso, Fukasawa forse un po' meno. Mi chiedo se questo ha un impatto?

ET: No. Anzi quando abbiamo fatto il primo libro di Fukasawa ha venduto di più di quello della Jongerius. Noi anche produciamo molta comunicazione. Siamo molto attivi anche sulla stampa non specializzata e questo è molto importante.

[0:38:00]

Se riesci ad avere un articolo sul New York Times fa la differenza. O comunque Observer, Guardian, Times, Independent, quelli sono proprio quelli che... Le riviste specializzate hanno un pubblico che si raggiunge in ogni caso, perché il circolo è quello, per cui se facciamo un libro su Hella Jongerius quelli che leggono Domus lo sanno. Mentre se invece si riesce ad arrivare all'ambiente più ampio che praticamente è quello dei supplementi del weekend o FT o Sole 24 ore. E poi noi li seguiamo, sappiamo sempre se hanno una talk, una mostra e allora ci siamo, organizziamo anche signing e cose di questo tipo che sono sempre molto utili, oppure se sappiamo che insegnano... Cerchiamo proprio di seguirli e poi di avere un dialogo aperto. Per noi non è mai fare un libro, per noi è aprire e costruire un rapporto. Per cui io faccio il libro con Hella e poi se lei ha bisogno di qualcosa o lei ha bisogno di qualcosa sappiamo che possiamo contare. È una ongoing relationship che per noi è molto importante.

# **APPENDIX VI: INTERVIEWS CASE STUDY 5**

TUESDAY, 3RD APRIL 2012 - LANZAVECCHIA + WAI STUDIO, PAVIA

## Transcript Francesca Lanzavecchia (Lanzavecchia + Wai)

■ visibility

■ autonomy

■ reputation

■ financial value

■ personal reward

Francesca Lanzavecchia: Una cosa che forse avrei dovuto dirti e' che i due progetti fatti per la Mercedes stanno avendo futuri molto diversi. Per i vasi stanno considerando una produzione fatta da noi di 20 pezzi da vendere. Mentre del tappeto non hanno chiesto niente.

Giovanni Innella: Abbiamo scelto quello sbagliato. Quindi quando dici "loro" ti riferisci a Mercedes?

FL: Hanno fatto dei gran casini, nel senso che quando mi ha chiamato questa signora responsabile degli shop Mercedes in Italia mi ha detto "guarda avrei bisogno per il mese prossimo di venti vasi devo contattare voi o chi li produce?". E io le ho risposto "Con tutta sincerita' gli accordi presi erano che Mercedes si riserva fino al dicembre 2013 il diritto di sfruttamento dei concept per produzione con relative royalties per il designer, ma non dobbiamo essere noi a produrre i pezzi". E lei ha replicato: "Io ne volevo venti, perche' non mi fate una quotation".

[0:02:00]

Sono successe delle robe un po' strane, credo all'interno perche' parlando con gli altri designer c'e' chi non ne ha saputo piu' niente...

GI: Parliamo del progetto piu' in generale, poi avrei bisogno di identificare il committente...

FL: Io credo che la committenza qui sia stata molto chiaramente RCS.

GI: RCS e'...

FL: Il Corriere della Sera. E' una cosa strana. A noi l'hanno venduta come una volonta' in primis di Mercedes di fare una linea casa, mentre Mercedes probabilmente ne stava facendo una di robe orribili cedendo il marchio e solite storie tipo la Porsche che fa i golfini Porsche o cose cosi'.

[0:04:00]

Sembrava partita come commissione Mercedes, ma secondo me il committente vero e' Case da Abitare, non RCS in generale. Case da Abitare doveva essere il curatore di questa collezione ovvero selezionare i progetti da poi portare in produzione.

[0:04:30]

Produzione che sarebbe partita dopo questi eventi Meet Design a Roma e a Torino, eventi che loro stanno continuando e vogliono portare anche a Tokyo, etc... per cui e' sempre la solita fiera mediatica. L'idea nostra da designer era quella di esaudire una richiesta da parte di Mercedes di disegnare - e c'era un briefing molto chiaro - quindi ispirati agli elementi della Mercedes e dell'auto con un linguaggio vicino a quello della Mercedes Benz, una serie di piccoli arredi e c'era proprio l'elenco degli arredi che avrebbero voluto per la collezione. Quando e' arrivato poi il momento della prototipazione il tempo era molto ristretto, ci hanno accennato il progetto ad Aprile dell'anno scorso durante il Salone ci hanno invitato ad un pranzo tutti noi giovani designer italiani under 35 e ci hanno annunciato questo progetto, poi ci hanno messo un pochino per metterlo in forma e ci e' arrivato poi un briefing che sembrava essere un po' piu' chiaro. Inizialmente sembrava che si sarebbero presi cura loro della prototipazione.

[0:06:00]

Poi in realta' essendo poco il tempo per la prototipazione ci e' stato chiesto di prenderci cura dei prototipi e di portarli a forma compiuta con un'azienda che fosse in grado di realizzarne in numeri ampi.

GI: Quindi un prototipo vero e proprio. Una serie 0.

[0:06:48]

FL: Esatto. E' cosi' e' stato fatto. Per il tappeto ho avuto la fortuna di conoscere il signor Galimberti di Nodus. Che e' una persona con cui spero di collaborare presto. Per la serie dei vasi potendone realizzare solo due, essendo...

Ci hanno dato dei soldi a scatola chiusa nel senso che hanno dato una sorta di medaglia d'oro e medaglie d'argento agli oggetti. Per cui l'oggetto che loro consideravano costare di piu' sono state le medaglie d'oro e medaglie d'argento per gli altri. Quindi dovevo stare all'interno di un budget.

GI: Che tu conoscevi in precedenza?

FL: No. Ce l'hanno detto nel momento in cui hanno detto quali fossero gli oggetti selezionati.

GI: Ma la proposta di progetto che hai fatto tu era gia' un prototipo?

FL: No, le proposte di progetto erano semplicemente delle intenzioni, dei rendering, degli schizzi...

GI: E il budget si e' concretizzato in quel momento?

FL: Il budget si e' concretizzato a oggetti scelti.

GI: Ma non ancora realizzati.

FL: Non ancora realizzati. E' stato proprio uno scambio, ci hanno dato 15 giorni per fare delle proposte. Ovviamente sono i 15 giorni in cui ha gia' da fare un sacco di altre cose... Il tappeto era pensato come un oggetto totalmente diverso. La tridimensionalita' era da ricercarsi con altri materiali, con altre fatture.

[0:08:00]

Col budget in mano sono andata poi a capire come si poteva rendere con una lavorazione possibile.

GI: Proviamo a riprendere in mano una traccia. Una domanda che chiedo a tutti e' di presentarsi brevemente.

FL: Sono Francesca Lanzavecchia, giovane designer italiana. Sono la meta' dello studio Lanzavecchia+Wai, A cavallo tra l'Italia e Singapore. Io e Hunn ci siamo conosciuti alla design Academy di Eindhoven, e' scoppiato un amore, e poi e' rimasto solo uno studio di Design. Lavoriamo in progetti che vanno dal vero e proprio design industriale, fino a progetti piu' concettuali da galleria, installazioni e... quello che passa il convento.

GI: In questo progetto, in questa commissione quale e' stato il tuo ruolo?

FL: Designer e autrice del tappeto.

GI: Chi altro era coinvolto nel progetto?

[0:09:50]

FL: Allora il progetto e' una collezione per la Mercedes Benz curata da Case da Abitare e edita per Mercedes. A fine innanzi tutto di mostra e poi non si sa.

[0:10:00]

GI: Pero' c'e' almeno in teoria una prospettiva di produzione.

FL: Si l'idea era quella, proprio. Non so quanto sia durata questa idea. Questo e' quello che mi chiedo. Poi appunto se i vasi dovessero avere un futuro diverso, si vedra'.

GI: Un futuro all'interno di Mercedes?

FL: Si, anche perche' al contrario di altri, quello che volevamo fare era davvero fare dei progetti per Mercedes e non per noi. Per cui non avrebbe senso tolto dal contesto di quello che pensavamo fosse

il cliente.

GI: Ecco. Cosa ha offerto Mercedes, in senso ampio?

[0:11:10]

FL: Questo progetto purtroppo va letto all'interno di cosa ha offerto Mercedes a RCS. Ora non vorrei mettermi a fare robe politiche. Però c'è un intermediario. Hanno organizzato questa bellissima mostra, soprattutto a Roma, era magnifica ai mercati Traianei dove c'era tutta la storia del design italiano in questo contesto magnifico. L'hanno portata anche a Torino, sponsorizzeranno anche eventi a Milano, Tokyo probabilmente.

GI: Torino è una declinazione della stessa mostra?

FL: Sì. La mostra stessa è Meet Design e a Milano sarà Meet in Milano e verrà presentata solo la parte di questa mostra che veniva intitolata Meet Talents.

[0:12:00]

Ovvero la parte del nostro progetto per Mercedes.

GI: Quindi, dovremmo parlare di una doppia committenza.

FL: Sì sì. Una doppia committenza dove all'inizio la sensazione era stata quella di avere curatela di Case da Abitare e la vera committenza Mercedes. E dove alla fine sono andate a fendersi e dove secondo me non c'è stata una comunicazione chiara su quelli che dovevano essere i ruoli a seguire. Come appunto ricevere una telefonata chiedendomi per i vasi.

GI: Tu ti aspettavi questa telefonata da Case da Abitare o da Mercedes?

FL: Io mi sarei aspettata da Mercedes una telefonata diversa. Perché gli accordi in teoria erano quelli "voi iniziate a trovare ci li possa produrre un domani, e poi noi ci occuperemo della produzione a royalties per voi". Non so può anche essere stato che siccome questa signora qui che mi ha chiamato è la responsabile dei punti vendita Mercedes può essere anche una mancanza di comunicazione interna probabilmente.

GI: Credi che RCS si sia eclissata dal rapporto con Mercedes?

[0:13:22]

FL: Dal rapporto commerciale di questa collezione. Io credo che quello sia la parte che si è eclissata quasi da subito. Credo che sia una situazione generalizzata come sensazione quella che sia stata RCS a pagare i nostri prototipi e non Mercedes direttamente, volesse dire che già mancava un'intenzione di base. Che poi probabilmente di soldi Mercedes ne aveva dati altro che quelli.

[0:14:00]

GI: Se Mercedes ha offerto un contesto concettuale di progettazione, come descriveresti il contributo di RCS alla commissione e al progetto?

[0:14:11]

FL: Un contributo di selezione di designer, di selezione dei progetti da portare avanti, per renderla per quanto possibile una collezione coerente. Una parte di curatela del progetto.

GI: Nel network del progetto abbiamo citato Mercedes, RCS, prima avevi nominato Nodus.

FL: Sì, essendoci chiesto di trovare dei contatti che rendessero possibile una produzione dei prodotti, avevo prima chiesto a Stepevi una ditta turca che ha uno showroom sempre vicino a Brera. E non riuscivano a fare la lavorazione del tappeto con la macchina, ma con la pistola con un degrade. Per me era una parte importante del progetto.

[0:15:18]

Non avrei neanche osato chiedere al signor Galimberti di Nodus se non fosse stato che Paolo Cappello, un altro dei ragazzi del gruppo un giorno mi chiama e mi dice "guarda sono amicissimo di, chiedi a lui che è una persona eccezionale" Io ti ho già super raccomandata, vai tranquilla farà tutto lui". Il signor Galimberti è stato eccezionale. Nel senso che è andato anche in India a controllare la lavorazione del tappeto. Questo tappeto è stato sbagliato tre volte. Avevamo tempo due mesi per farlo e' stato spedito a Roma

all'ultimo, abbiamo fatto un cambio, riportato il tappeto, insomma ne sono successe di mille colori ovviamente.

[0:16:00]

Si e' stabilito un bel rapporto con lui, sicuramente.

GI: Cappello e' un designer?

[0:16:18] [0:16:18]

FL: Paolo Cappello, si e' sempre coinvolto nel progetto. E' molto in gamba, e' piu' un designer industriale. Ha fatto crescere moltissimo negli ultimi anni la miniform che e' una piccola azienda italiana per cui lui ha fatto dei tavoli molto premiati, etc. E' un altro designer che lavora da un lato facendo le cose che gli piacciono e dall'altro cura anche tutti gli interni di Calzedonia etc.

[0:16:50]

Sicuramente una delle cose piu' piacevoli di tutto questo progetto e' stato conoscere gli altri Italiani, perche' essendo stata all'estero per tanti anni non mi era stata data l'opportunita'. E stata un po' una spinta nel mondo italiano, poi la collezione e' stata recensita da vari teorici... Ha avuto sicuramente una forza di comunicazione grande.

[0:17:35] [0:17:35]

Nel catalogo stesso c'e' il signor Cappellini si scrive una critica su ogni designer di questi talents. Una bellissima opportunita' mi ricordo ancora quando mi avevano chiamato da RCS, lui era li' in redazione e stava anche lui giudicando i progetti da selezionare e in seguito ha scritto dei commenti ai nostri progetti.

[0:18:00]

Ci sono vari pro in questo

GI: Credi che rispetto ai tuoi progetti precedenti, questo ti avvicini al mondo dell'industria?

FL: Per noi era una volonta' per far vedere che il nostro linguaggio possa essere applicato ad altri, per altri. Cioe' che non necessariamente... a volte ci viene detto di essere un po' eccessivi, troppo colorati, troppo texturizzati, la texture non necessariamente vuol dire che bisogna allontanarsi dalla comunicazione del marchio. Per noi e' stata una bella occasione di far vedere che il nostro linguaggio poteva adattarsi in modi altri che le commissioni nostre o da gallerie insomma. Era anche una sfida per noi, perche' lavorando tanto con il lato soft degli oggetti, la macchina, il motore era sicuramente qualcosa di lontano da noi.

GI: Quali sono state le ragioni che ti han fatto accettare questa commissione?

FL: Di base io ho difficolta' a dire di no. Penso che sia giusto vedere noi stessi in dei contesti molto diversi. Questo sicuramente lo era. Da un altro punto di vista il fatto di provare una commissione che arrivava da una rivista, da dei comunicatori invece che da un'azienda vera e propria. E poi anche i tempi molto ristretti, il fatto che non ci avrei perso troppo tempo, quello era un lato positivo della cosa e la voglia come sempre di materializzare le idee.

[0:20:00]

GI: Tu eri gia' in contatto con RCS in precedenza? Avevi gia' una relazione con loro?

FL: Ero in contatto con RCS nel senso che avevo contatti di savariate giornaliste che erano passate.

GI: Ma mai con il gruppo editoriale?

FL: No.

GI: E con Mercedes?

[0:20:36]

FL: No, di nessun tipo. Credo che l'intento di Case da Abitare fosse un intento molto nobile nel senso che loro tra tutte le testate di RCS, casa amica, abitare, etc... siano la testata un po' piu' orientata ai giovani. Per cui volevano fare un passo avanti nell'aiutare i giovani. Han fatto una selezione di persone.

GI: Io questo progetto non ho avuto la fortuna di vederlo di persona. Ne ho avuto esperienza attraverso le

immagini. Chi ha fatto le foto?

[0:21:20]

FL: Noi ci affidiamo spesso e volentieri ad amici fotografi. E' molto importante comunicare bene i nostri prodotti. Io adoro curare la fotografia, la location, etc... Per cui c'e' questa bella sinergia con amici fotografi in generale, soprattutto con Davide Farabegoli che ha gia' fotografato tanti dei nostri progetti e che fotograferà prossimamente anche il progetto per il salone.

GI: Come funziona la direzione artistica del servizio fotografico?

[0:22:00]

FL: Di solito mi viene chiesto di pensare alle location, al look and feel e poi ovviamente magari la location non funziona e si scappa da qualche altra parte.

GI: Prima citavi il catalogo come un media report che ti ha appagato

FL: Si

GI: Ne ricordi altri?

FL: Ci sono stati dei video... Ecco secondo me in quel caso Case da Abitare non ha comunicato bene sulle proprie testate. Nel senso che se io fossi stata il comunicatore che cura la collezione, avrei fatto ogni mese prima della mostra dei trafiletti sui lavori in fieri, etc... Infatti avevo anche mandato, suggerendo delle piccole fotografie, e secondo me li' non hanno calcato abbastanza la mano. Poi varie altre testate ne hanno parlato, video, giornali classici.

[0:23:25]

Sicuramente il catalogo e' il piu' appagante, ma anche perche' ne e' stato scritto in una maniera in cui non ne avrei scritto io. Questa e' la differenza tra chi fa il vero giornalismo e chi copia-incolla dal tuo sito quello che dici.

GI: Ti capita spesso?

[0:23:41]

FL: Spesso, pero' devo dire che ultimamente ho fatto delle interviste vere, dove si parla al telefono, si parla a tu per tu e dopo quello che viene scritto e' tutta farina del sacco del giornalista, il che mi fa molto piacere.

[0:24:00]

GI: Ti appaga sapere che qualcuno e' interessato a quello che dici?

FL: Ma che qualcuno le riscriva. Io mi annoio a sentirle dette sempre come le dico io. Che qualcuno le riscriva e riviva a modo suo. Anche perche' credo che quello sia il bello del nostro mestiere. Altrimenti il rischio e' di leggere gli stessi articoli ovunque. Infatti si fa piu' giornalismo in riviste che non sono necessariamente legate al mondo del design.

GI: Perche'?

[0:24:56]

FL: Perche' succede cosi' semplicemente. Sono stata chiamata questa mattina per un'intervista su Sette da un giornalista del Corriere della Sera e mi ha tenuto al telefono un'ora. Abbiamo fatto una bellissima chiacchierata, chissà cosa ne uscirà, ma e' la differenza tra rispondere ad una domanda e dammi l'accesso al sito press e ...

GI: Che differenza noti tra i media del design e media diversi?

[0:25:33]

FL: C'e' un interesse piu' profondo che va dalla persona al progetto, al percorso nelle domande che pongono giornali non specialistici. Credo che sia anche una curiosita' verso quello che e' il nostro lavoro. Una delle domande che di solito pongono e' "ma si guadagna bene a fare i designer?".



[0:26:00]

Sono piu' interessati a 360 gradi, nel senso che poi hanno meno paura di fare dei commenti anche erronei sul progetto stesso. Mi divertono di piu' anche.

GI: Quanto pensi che la tua presenza sui media abbia influito sullo sviluppo della tua carriera?

FL: Una cosa molto ridicola che ho riscontrato recentemente, e' stato il fatto di aver preso lavori anche abbastanza grossi ultimamente attraverso blog. Gente che dice dovete essere voi... ma non gente di qua, che posso conoscere... ad Hong Kong ed in Brasile, gente lontana... Quello mi ha fatto capire la potenza della comunicazione.

GI: Mi parli di progetti al di fuori dell'Europa, rispetto ai progetti fatti in Europa quali differenze noti sia per quanto riguarda il progetto che la comunicazione del progetto.

FL: Allora, non posso parlare ancora della comunicazione di questi ultimi progetti perche' non sono ancora terminati. Il primo, quello Brasiliano e' un progetto che andra' a finire a Parigi. E' uno strano gruppo di lavoro di gente di tutto il mondo.

[0:28:00] [0:28:00]

Chi ce l'ha commissionato sono dei comunicatori, sono dei creatori di brand. E loro hanno anche questo network, hanno questa idea di mettere insieme delle teste da tutto il mondo e iniziare a fare delle cose nuove insieme. Effettivamente sono molto bravi a mettere insieme le persone. Ci hanno visto su Dezeen, han detto voglio lavorare con loro, abbiamo fatto preventivi di progetto, due schizzi, moodboard, etc... era un progetto che loro cercavano di portare avanti gia' da un 3-4 anni avevano gia' lavorato con altri due studi di design grossi, non era mai uscito il mood che ricercavano loro, ci siamo trovati abbastanza subito e sta andando avanti. Ci hanno visto su Dezeen, io immaginavo che ci avessero visto su qualcosa tipo Vogue Brasile. Stessa osa con questi di Hong Kong.

GI: Tornando sul progetto Mercedes. Tu cosa hai fornito?

[0:30:00]

FL: Ci erano stati chiesti tre progetti, io di solito ho difficolta' a filtrare, per cui ne abbiamo presentati cinque: c'erano due tappeti diversi, una libreria, dei vassoi e i vasi. Progetti grezzi fatti velocemente. Quello e' il tempo che io considero il tempo piu' prezioso, cio'e la parte di concezione, di concettualizzazione. Abbiamo fornito quello, assistenza alla prototipazione dove possibile, nel senso che purtroppo non sono mai partita per l'india per andare a vedere il mio tappeto come andava e consegna prototipi. Questi prototipi poi torneranno a noi alla fine del 2013. Speriamo che siano a posto, nel senso che l'altro giorno mi chiama Alessandra Fedeli - una di RCS - e mi dice "Francesca siamo qua a Roma che stiamo ri-allestendo un'altra piccola mostra volevamo usare il tappeto, pero' non c'e' spazio per appenderlo al muro, possiamo camminarci sopra?" "Nooo".

GI: Insieme ai prototipi ritornano anche i diritti?

FL: Si, si. Anche se fare un progetto ad hoc poi non ha senso riutilizzarlo.

GI: Quanta autonomia ti e' stata accordata?

[0:31:36]

FL: Totale, tolto ad un certo punto la paura che io avessi fatto degli stravolgimenti terribili per stare nel budget col prototipo del tappeto. Quindi c'e' stato un momento di terrore, mi hanno chiamato "Ma l'effetto 3D viene mantenuto?". Poi credo che fossero abbastanza contenti.

[0:32:00]

In realta' a Roma c'e' stato il tappeto sballato in mostra, che purtroppo e' lo stesso che e' nelle foto del catalogo. Perche' era taftato a striscioni di colore.

GI: Parlami dei pezzi, cosa e' successo una volta che sono stati realizzati?

FL: Una volta realizzati noi li abbiamo portati a RCS Milano che ha portato tutta la mostra ai mercati Traianei. Da li' fino a Dicembre 2013 sara' a loro, o di Mercedes, responsabilita'

di portarli in giro, promuoverli. In teoria con fine vendita, con fine produzione, poi vedremo. All'inizio doveva essere una mostra a Roma e una a Torino, poi abbiamo saputo di questa replica a Roma e a Milano per il salone. Mentre sarebbero dovute essere delle mostre nei Mercedes shop. Per cui secondo me e' tutto molto in fieri, io non credo che ci sia una strategia, ma non credo neanche che lo facciano a fin di male.

[0:33:38]

Questa cosa di Milano non ce l'aspettavamo e va benissimo esserci anche li' in zona Tortona, durante il Salone, spazio Ansaldo, bellissimo. La mostra li' sara' sempre sponsorizzata da Mercedes e da Franke le cucine tedesche, che sponsorizzano mostre, anche una mostra sul design cinese, etc...

[0:34:00]

Sara' tutto lo spazio Ansaldo curato da loro.

GI: Quelli che vediamo sono tutti i progetti cui ti dedichi?

FL: No, quella e' la punta dell'iceberg.

GI: E gli altri progetti?

FL: Il 90% non arriva alla conclusione, sono commissioni che partono e poi non si realizzano. Di solito per piccole aziende, che rabbia. Poi non e' neanche detto che sarebbero i progetti di cui sarei fiero, pero' c'e' un po' di frustrazione. Quello che vedete e' la punta dell'iceberg, poi le cose che voglio che diventino realta', le faccio diventare realta'.

GI: Ci sono progetti che hai completato e che hai mantenuto fuori dal mondo dei media?

[0:36:00]

FL: No... si qualcosa di piccolo, perche' non mi interessa che sia legato alla nostra immagine.

GI: Credi che se quei progetti diventassero parte della tua immagine andrebbero a influire nel tipo di commissioni e clienti?

[0:36:16]

FL: Probabilmente si. Mi piace controllare quello che passa.

GI: Il tuo progetto di laurea che ruolo ha avuto sullo sviluppo della tua carriera?

FL: Il mio progetto di laurea mi sarebbe piaciuto che fosse diventato realta'. Non e' stato possibile nonostante sia quasi partito un percorso di lavoro con tre aziende diverse. Quest'anno ripartiamo un po' dal mio progetto di laurea, nei progetti che presenteremo al satellite. Un po' dal mio progetto di laurea e un po' dalla mia ri-industrializzazione. In qualche modo quando ero in Olanda avrei buttato tutto quello che avevo imparato al politecnico e in qualche modo mi sta tornando una voglia di esserci davvero e non solo in poche cose piccole e solo per pochi.

GI: Qual'e' la tua ambizione?

FL: Secondo me sono due studi che co-esistono, io non credo che le due cose si escludano.

[0:38:00]

Ovviamente i tempi dell'industria non permettono lunghe ricerche, non permettono di fare cose estreme, per cui credo che per noi sia importante mantenere questa ambivalenza.

GI: Qual'e' il valore reale di un media report?

[0:39:11][0:39:11]

FL: Se mi porta lavoro va bene. Se investissi cosi' tanto per non essere pubblicata e viaggiare per il mondo, avrebbe tutto meno senso probabilmente...

GI: Credi che la tua visibilita' abbia un impatto sui tuoi progetti?

[0:40:00]

FL: Si, sicuramente. Da quantificare e' difficile. Si impattano entrambi. Il prossimo progetto ha un impatto dalle vecchie pubblicazioni, e' quasi una catena in qualche modo.

GI: E' un vincolo?

FL: Il dover pubblicare?

GI: Oppure il dover essere coerente con la pubblicazione precedente

FL: No, la volonta' nostra e' quella di continuare a cambiare a modo nostro, anzi forse e' importante che un lavoro non sia troppo in relazione con l'altro. Ovviamente ci sono dei punti molto forti, punti chiave del nostro creare, che saranno un fil rouge all'interno dei progetti.

## Transcript Francesca Taroni (Case da Abitare)

■ visibility   ■ autonomy   ■ reputation   ■ financial value   ■ personal reward

Giovanni Innella: La prima domanda che ti farei e' una breve presentazione tua.

Francesca Taroni: Sì. Io sono Francesca Taroni, direttore di Case da Abitare, dall'edizione di Aprile 2008, anno in cui il giornale e' stato rilanciato con un progetto grafico ed editoriale di Tyler Brule. Per cui c'e' stato un primo momento di lavoro di team insieme agli inglesi e poi appunto il giornale si e' sviluppato nella veste in cui lo si vede oggi. Per cui il senso del rilancio e' stato dargli un taglio piu' legato al design, siamo stati un po' i primi a parlare sui mensili di arredamento, di industrie, di processi di realizzazione dell'oggetto, andare a vedere cosa ci fosse dietro l'oggetto, le qualita' artigianali, qualita' industriali, per cui andare un po' piu' a fondo per fare anche dei distinguo fra i vari produttori. C'e' chi veramente ha investito in tecnologie e chi invece no. Quindi l'approccio che abbiamo sempre avuto nei confronti del design e' sempre stato quello di andare a vedere al di la' della forma estetica, tutto quello che ci stava dietro.

GI: Adesso mi spiego la grafica che c'e' dietro le tue spalle, il poster della copertina del numero di Aprile 2008...

[0:02:00]

FT: Sì, questa copertina e' stata proprio quella del lancio del nuovo progetto. Per cui l'idea era proprio quella di cercare qualcosa che comunicasse questo cambio di direzione e questa concentrazione sul mondo del design.

GI: In questo progetto per Mercedes, quale e' stato il ruolo di Case da Abitare?

[0:02:30][0:02:30]

FT: Allora, intanto va detto che Mercedes e' stato il main sponsor di Meet Design. Quindi sono stati loro a supportare per primi l'iniziativa di Rizzoli che e' stata quella di realizzare una grande mostra sulla storia del design italiano che e' iniziata a Roma ai mercati di Traiano e poi ha proseguito il suo corso a Palazzo Bertalazzoni a Torino.

[0:03:07]

Essendo Mercedes il main sponsor ed avendo Mercedes mostrato l'interesse nell'entrare nel mondo del design in maniera un po' piu' incisiva che non semplicemente come mecenate di un evento culturale, a noi e' venuta l'idea di coinvolgere dei giovani talenti del design italiano nella realizzazione di una mini home collection al mondo dell'automobile.

[0:03:46]

Pero' e' interessante perche' noi abbiamo coinvolto un gruppo di designer di cui avevamo gia' parlato sul numero di Aprile di Case da Abitare, noi avevamo fatto questa ricerca a 360\* cercando di individuare quali fossero i talenti italiani under 35 in circolazione. Perche' e' vero che nel nostro mondo si pecca un po' di esterofilia... e' vero che si parla sempre di quei tre-quattro nomi cui vengono affidate la maggior parte delle collezioni piu' conosciute a livello internazionale. Per cui essendo il numero che andava distribuito durante il salone del mobile, ci era piaciuta l'idea di fare e propria ricerca e capire cosa bolliva nella nostra pentola, senza andare a cadere sempre sui tre-quattro stranieri che piacciono tanto alle riviste di arredamento.

[0:04:54]

Ed abbiamo tirato fuori 25 nomi molto interessanti, che ci e' sembrato naturale coinvolgere nel momento in cui si e' presentata questa occasione di ideare un progetto che potesse traghettare Mercedes nel mondo del design abbiamo pensato di mettere insieme quello che era stato un nostro lavoro di scouting redazionale con un grande nome, perche' la cosa avrebbe potuto veramente significare per i ragazzi, intanto una visibilita' che altrimenti non avrebbero avuto e poi la possibilita' di entrare concretamente in contatto con un'azienda internazionale di quel calibro che avrebbe veramente potuto significare la svolta per qualcuno di loro. Per cui trovo che il progetto si sia sviluppato nella maniera corretta, nel

sensò che ai ragazzi non è stata fatta alcun tipo di richiesta a livello commerciale.

[0:06:00]

Cioè nessuno ha mai imposto loro di logare i progetti, poi essendoci di mezzo un giornale come Case da Abitare che ogni mese ha una sessione che si intitola talent show proprio dedicata a dare visibilità ai giovani emergenti... insomma non si voleva assolutamente ricadere in una mera operazione di merchandising a puri scopi commerciali, quindi a tutti i ragazzi naturalmente è stato chiesto di interpretare molto liberamente il brief del riferimento al mondo dell'automobile e di Mercedes in particolare. Non sono state fatte imposizioni di nessun genere. Questo è ben evidente dalla collezione che ne è emersa, perché se tu non sapessi che si tratta per esempio di una seggiola la cui struttura richiama la stella Mercedes, mai ti verrebbe in mente. Davvero gli oggetti in mostra avevano tutti vicino una lunga spiegazione perché i passaggi erano talmente articolati che il riferimento al mondo automobilistico richiedeva una didascalia precisa che facesse ripercorrere proprio il percorso progettuale dall'idea alla realizzazione finale. Naturalmente Case da Abitare ha fatto un po' da curatore alla nascita di questa collezione perché avevamo dato una serie di tipologie di riferimento e per non rischiare che sui 23 studi di progettazione 20 progettassero una sedia e 2 un bicchiere, abbiamo un pochino gestito le varie proposte che sono arrivate.

[0:08:00]

Però quello che trovo molto interessante è che avendo lasciati liberi tutti anche di appoggiarsi al fornitore che preferivano si è anche creata una mappa produttiva internazionale di eccellenze artigianali davvero interessanti: dai marmisti veneti ai tessitori indiani, alle cristallerie austriache.

[0:08:23] [0:08:23]

Anche questa libertà di realizzazione, dando ovviamente la possibilità di citare l'azienda o l'artigiano che li aveva supportati, ha creato una grande ricchezza nell'uso dei materiali e un'altissima qualità di realizzazione che ci hanno riconosciuto tutti, perché naturalmente Mercedes metteva a disposizione un rimborso a seconda del tipo di prototipo che andava realizzato, però c'è stato qualcuno che supportato da un'azienda che ha creduto nel progetto e ha visto in questa cosa anche la possibilità di avere una visibilità a sua volta, davvero hanno raggiunto dei livelli di cura veramente elevati.

GI: Hai citato tre ruoli che Case da Abitare ha coperto: uno di curatela, uno di risonanza – la visibilità – e infine quello di legame con il mondo dell'industria. Pensi che quello di legare con l'industria sia uno dei ruoli dei media nel mondo del design?

[0:09:40] [0:09:40]

[0:09:40]

FT: Sì. Penso che sia uno dei nostri ruoli. So per certo che alcuni dei grandi studi di design tengono molto in considerazione la rivista e se noi presentiamo dei giovani designer di Singapore

[0:10:00]

poi li vedo magari dopo qualche mese coinvolti in qualche azienda del Made in Italy. Per cui testo spesso il fatto che la rivista venga guardata e tenuta in considerazione, perché facendo uno scouting di questo genere a livello internazionale diventa importante per le aziende, per innovarsi, tenere sott'occhio questo tipo di lavoro. Aggiungo un'altra cosa sul progetto di Mercedes. Quello che sta succedendo adesso è che Mercedes sta valutando addirittura di mettere in produzione alcuni degli oggetti della home collection.

[0:10:46]

E questo trovo che sia la cosa al di là della visibilità, molto molto importante. Perché il grosso rischio è che questi eventi siano sì degli eventi che danno visibilità, ma che la cosa poi rimanga lì.

[0:11:01] [0:11:01]

Infatti io ho scritto questo articolo sul dorso Design che facciamo insieme al Corriere della Sera che viene distribuito durante il Salone del Mobile, dove in qualche modo polemizzo un pochino rispetto al fatto che è vero che in questo momento le aziende sono molto disposte a sponsorizzare eventi che coinvolgono i giovani, ma molte volte la logica è quella di farsi pubblicità e poi di non portare avanti questi rapporti.

[0:11:37]

Devo dire che nel caso di Mercedes la visibilità è stata amplissima, perché la mostra da Roma è andata a Torino, è stata raccontata da tutte le testate del circuito Rizzoli, pubblicata su un catalogo, per cui già a livello di visibilità ne sarebbe valsa la pena. In più c'è addirittura... si sta muovendo

qualcosa proprio per mettere in produzione alcuni dei pezzi. Perché naturalmente quando è stata creata questa collezione, poi è stato comunicato ai ragazzi che l'azienda si riservava la possibilità di ragionare su cosa produrre e cosa no e poi allo scadere di una certa data i ragazzi sarebbero ritornati in possesso del loro progetto e sarebbero stati liberi di andarlo a proporre a chi avessero ritenuto opportuno.

[0:12:32]

Pero' devo dire che il problema che molte volte si riscontra è che queste operazioni abbiano un fine puramente mediatico e che poi non procedano in una direzione concreta. D'altra parte il momento è quello che è, c'è una grossa crisi nel nostro settore e sicuramente anche da quello che si è visto nell'ultimo salone del mobile le aziende sono molto caute e preferiscono puntare sui nomi noti e rischiare meno con i giovani. Purtroppo è così'.

GI: Qualora Mercedes intendesse procedere con la produzione, Case da Abitare avrebbe ancora un ruolo?

[0:13:26]

FT: Avrebbe un ruolo in quanto curatore. Per cui la collezione si chiamerebbe "Mercedes Benz home collection by Case da Abitare". Però noi siamo un media, per cui non ne ricaveremmo nulla.

GI: Solo crediting?

FT: Sì. Esattamente.

GI: Quindi la vita dei prototipi qual'è?

FT: Allora questi prototipi sono a disposizione di Mercedes fino a una data che mi sembra coincida con la fine di questo anno. Se Mercedes vuole allestire delle vetrine, dei punti vendita con quei prototipi lo può fare.

[0:14:36]

Sono stati ripresentati anche durante il salone del mobile di Milano perché c'è stato appunto un evento rizzoli nell'ambito del quale è stata anche lanciata la nuova Classe A di Mercedes e allora la parte della home collection è stata inserita e quindi ha avuto grande visibilità durante il salone perché Roma e Torino per quanto siano due piazze interessanti non sono il fulcro del design come lo può essere Milano nel mese di Aprile. Entro questi mesi Mercedes deciderà che cosa produrre e a questo punto prenderà accordi con i designer direttamente, perché a quel punto il ruolo nostro che è stato di selezionare i giovani, di metterli in contatto, di guidarli nella realizzazione di questo progetto speciale sponsorizzato da Mercedes, a questo punto il ruolo attivo si esaurisce e diventa il credito dell'operazione.

GI: Vi capita spesso di lavorare su schemi del genere oppure no?

FT: No, era una cosa totalmente nuova.

GI: Esperienza positiva?

FT: Molto! Complicata perché come tutte le cose un po' nuove non aveva un progresso né da parte nuova, né da parte dei ragazzi. Per cui era tutto una telefonata "non ho capito se... ma i soldi arriveranno... ma dopo io..." Quindi sono stati mesi complicati, però siamo stati veramente contenti al di là dello scontato buonismo. Perché abbiamo visto grande entusiasmo da parte dei ragazzi che davvero non si sono sottratti a un ragionamento intellettualmente serio, nel senso che nessuno ha cercato la scorciatoia per fare scena. Tutti si sono presentati con 2/3 progetti ben elaborati, noi ne abbiamo scelti da prototipare solo un certo numero,

[0:17:13]

però l'intero materiale che ci hanno fornito è comunque di qualità ed è raccolto in un video e in un libro edito da Skira, e' possibile comprarlo in libreria.

GI: Ha un'introduzione di Cappellini?

FT: Ecco, noi per quanto riguarda la sezione talent che e' quella che abbiamo curato noi, io ho scritto in introduzione quello che sto raccontando a te, cioe' di come e' nato tutto il progetto.

[0:17:52]

Pero' ho ritenuto opportuno chiamare Giulio Cappellini che e' il talent scout per definizione in Italia, e abbiamo mostrato a lui in anticipo tutti i progetti ricevuti dai ragazzi e lui e' stato cosi' gentile da scrivere un'introduzione del progetto avendo la cura di citare progetto per progetto, due parole per tutti i ragazzi, mettendo in evidenza ogni volta che cosa c'era di nuovo in quel progetto. Comunque alla fine anche Giulio ne deduce che i giovani designer di questi tempi stanno avendo veramente un approccio serio. Nel senso che c'e' grande impegno da parte di tutti, grande responsabilita' anche nel progetto oggetti che siano riproducibili, che non siano semplicemente delle boutade per far scena, ma tutti i progetti potrebbero entrare in produzione domani, sono gia' ingegnerizzati. E questo denota un atteggiamento serio e responsabile da parte dei ragazzi.

GI: Era una richiesta vostra questa?

FT: No. Pero' essendosi tutti rivolti a produttori hanno gia' affrontato il problema della riproducibilita' dell'oggetto insieme al loro produttore di riferimento. E' chiaro che ci sono cose tipo lo specchio della Maddalena Casadei di Marmo di Carrara massiccio, di quello non ne puoi fare duecentomila. Pero' nascendo come oggetto in serie limitata, in quella dimensione possono vivere.

GI: Case da Abitare puo' essere considerato un brand di design secondo te?

FT: Si.

GI: Puo' crescere in quel senso?

FT: Marchiando oggetti intendi?

GI: Questo lo chiedo a te.

FT: Io non ho mai ragionato in termini di costruire una collezione marchiata Case da Abitare pero' sicuramente il nostro punto di vista e' talmente preciso e riconoscibile che almeno a detta degli altri... se tu apri il giornale e tu non sai che e' Case da Abitare e vedi una doppia pagina dici questo e' Case da Abitare. Questo e' quello che mi viene detto. Noi abbiamo sicuramente un punto di vista molto preciso e questo fa si che il giornale sia un brand, assolutamente. E un domani chissa' potremmo essere noi editori di una collezione di oggetti di design.

GI: Secondo me questo e' un momento dell'industria interessante perche' c'e' una condizione totalmente egualitaria, Tom Dixon che e' un designer e non un'azienda e' tanto design quanto Cappellini o Dezeen... Ci si puo' scambiare i ruoli....

FT: Si bisogna vedere poi come funziona dal punto di vista commerciale ed economico. A me quello che interessa e' il punto di vista editoriale del giornale. La liberta' di scegliere in tutto il mondo quello che secondo noi e' interessante, potrebbe avere un futuro, etc... e questa e' una logica che difficilmente si sposa con un progetto commerciale di ampio respiro, perche' la liberta' presuppone che tu... Pero' cio' non toglie che rispetto a pezzi come quelli della collezione di Mercedes, come per esempio questa sedia di metallo ondulato rivestito di alcantara che io trovo bellissima e molto originale... Ecco io una linea Case da Abitare me la vedo un po' in questa direzione, perche' assomiglia al giornale.

Essendo pero' Tyler Brule' un po' il nostro riferimento visto che e' lui che ha firmato il progetto, etc... che ogni sei mesi se ne inventa una, l'ultima che ho visto - meravigliosa - una fiera addirittura con gli alimenti freschi, km0, dove Monocle diventa davvero il brand che raccoglie dalle marmellate del Sussex...

GI: Qual'e' il vostro rapporto con Tyler Brule'?

FT: In questo rapporto non stiamo collaborando, perche' il contratto si e' esaurito, pero' c'e' un ottimo rapporto. E poi il grafico che ai tempi lavorava per Wincreative [23:40] che e' l'agenzia di Tyler Brule' che ha disegnato a livello grafico il giornale, e' ritornato ad essere il nostro art director perche' ha aperto un suo studio. Per cui da qualche tempo e' sempre lui che e' tornato a seguire il giornale. Per cui questo legame con il mondo anglosassone continua.

GI: Tu sei spesso in Inghilterra?

FT: Viaggio spesso... piu' che altro i miei spostamenti sono legati alle fiere del settore internazionale.

GI: Com'e' l'impatto del Salone di Milano o 100% Design sull'attivita' in relazione?

FT: Naturalmente Milano rimane l'evento di design piu' importante a livello mondiale, anche Londra e' una bella fucina di stile.

GI: La vostra attivita' cambia in prossimita' di questi eventi?

FT: No, nel senso che c'e' sempre un giornalista che va e a Ottobre ci sara' la Beijing design Week e andro' li' una settimana. C'e' sempre un giornalista che copre questi eventi e poi a seconda del report che ne fa si decide come... pero' non abbiamo per esempio in questo momento all'attivo degli eventi Case da Abitare a Londra 100% Design, cosa che invece in prospettiva vorremmo fare.



# **APPENDIX VII: INTERVIEWS CASE STUDY 6**

## Transcript Andrea Trimarchi (FormaFantasma)

■ visibility

■ autonomy

■ reputation

■ financial value

■ personal reward

Giovanni Innella: Potresti introdurti brevemente?

Andrea Trimarchi: Sono Andrea, faccio parte di Studio Forma Fantasma, sono l'altra metà di studio Forma Fantasma. Il nostro Studio è nato nel 2009, subito dopo la laurea alla Design Academy di Eindhoven, a settembre, anche se io e Simone abbiamo cominciato a lavorare assieme precedentemente, sia durante il Master abbiamo fatto alcuni progetti poi finiti nella collezione di Droog. A anche ancora precedentemente a Firenze, io e Simone ci siamo conosciuti quando frequentavamo l'ISIA dove abbiamo studiato dal 2005 al 2007. Abbiamo cominciato a lavorare lì insieme, anche se su progetti che non erano legati al design ma più alla grafica. Anche se era una scuola di design, ci siamo trovati a lavorare più sul computer, con i mezzi che avevamo, quindi facevamo più grafica che prodotto. Abbiamo deciso di aprire lo studio insieme a settembre del 2009, da due anni e mezzo abbiamo lo studio ad Eindhoven e lavoriamo.

[0:02:00]

GI: La grafica all'inizio era una questione di opportunità?

AT: Sì, di necessità direi. Quello è uno dei grandi difetti dell'università italiana, soprattutto dell'ISIA in particolare, che sono scuole veramente piccole, che sono nate subito dopo il boom economico negli anni 70 e in quel momento erano veramente una forza perché il design non era una disciplina a tutti gli effetti in Italia, era appena cominciato a nascere. Ovviamente era limitato, limitate erano le persone, limitata era la disciplina e andava bene avere una scuola così piccola. Adesso è una scuola piccola che potrebbe avere un sacco di opportunità però non ha né mezzi economici, né struttura. Ha degli insegnanti bravi, per esempio io ho studiato con alcuni Archi Zoom, con Deganello e con Corretti, quindi con gente anche veramente brava e anche un po' più alternativa rispetto agli altri designer italiani, però adesso è un disastro. Ti trovi a dover fare grafica, o se non fai grafica fai più rendering, a me non interessava quello, quindi...

GI: Forma Fantasma esisteva già in un contesto così?

AT: Sì, diciamo che abbiamo iniziato a collaborare insieme e ci chiamavamo Forma Fantasma però non era ufficiale come quando siamo andati alla camera di commercio ed abbiamo fatto nascere lo studio.

GI: Tu pensi che Forma Fantasma possa esistere ovunque, come esisteva a Firenze, poi è continuato ad esistere ad Eindhoven e se dovesse andare da un'altra parte esisterebbe lo stesso?

[0:04:00]

AT: Sì. Tu intendi come disciplina?

GI: Sì. La mia riflessione parte dal fatto che avete iniziato la grafica per una questione di necessità. Qui state facendo un tipo di design pertinente col design esistente sul territorio. Mi chiedevo se fosse portato altrove, FormaFantasma esisterebbe lo stesso?

AT: Si esisterebbe, ma sempre come design, nell'ambito del design. Non credo che andremmo mai in altri ambiti. Già adesso ci stiamo spostando di più verso il product. Stiamo cominciando alcune collaborazioni con ditte, siamo interessati all'ampio spettro del design. Però non andremo mai a far grafica, anche se in alcuni lavori che faremo ci saranno alcune parti di illustrazione, però il nostro ambito è quello del design.

GI: Design del prodotto?

AT: Sì.

GI: Per tornare su Botanica, puoi descrivere il ruolo che Forma Fantasma ha avuto in questo progetto?

AT: Allora, abbiamo avuto una commissione dalla Fondazione Plart e da Marco Petroni. Loro ci hanno contattato come designer, quindi per fare degli oggetti in plastica. Noi quando lavoriamo non ci fermiamo mai solo a disegnare degli oggetti, ma ci piace contestualizzarli. Infatti il progetto poi era un'installazione più che degli oggetti fisici, cioè c'erano degli oggetti fisici, ma c'era anche un'installazione.

[0:06:00]

Diciamo che per noi è stato interessante quando abbiamo ricevuto la mail e quando abbiamo parlato con Marco, perché Botanica nasce come un secondo capitolo di Autarky, che è un progetto che abbiamo presentato l'anno prima a Milano. Infatti quando abbiamo ricevuto la chiamata da Maria Pia e da Marco eravamo un po' sorpresi perché loro avevano visto Autarky che non era un progetto sulla plastica. Anzi diciamo che era un progetto all'opposto dei materiali plastici, quindi quando loro ci hanno detto che volevano che facessimo qualcosa in plastica eravamo rimasti un po' sorpresi e non capivamo bene perché avessero chiamato noi per fare un progetto sulla plastica, loro volevano un tripudio alla plastica, questo è quello che ci avevano detto. La prima immagine che avevamo era la bottiglia di plastica e il patch in mezzo all'oceano atlantico, non so dov'è. Quindi eravamo un po' vittime del nostro pregiudizio verso la plastica, poi invece abbiamo cercato di capire meglio, forse abbiamo indagato in maniera personale la commissione data. Siamo andati a scoprire invece la pre-plastica, prima dell'avvento del petrolio, prima della plastica che conosciamo noi.

GI: Se dovessi citare altre persone coinvolte nel progetto, chi citeresti?

AT: Allora abbiamo collaborato con un sacco di persone in quel periodo. Soprattutto nella parte di ricerca, poi per la parte di produzione è stata fatta in maggior parte all'interno dello studio. Di ricerca abbiamo contattato alcune persone in alcune università tipo alla Wageningen, abbiamo avuto un sacco di informazioni on-line. La maggior parte del lavoro si è svolto on-line o in blog, perché c'è veramente un movimento adesso che è quello del DIY.

[0:08:00]

Quindi c'è un sacco di gente che cerca di farsi la propria plastica, ci sono molte informazioni reperibili online. Una delle più memorabili per noi è stato un vecchio dentista di 90 anni che ci ha raccontato come un volta lui faceva i calchi dei denti e che usava la Scellac, la gomma lacca e ci ha spiegato lui come mescolare, come rendere più durevole, più resistente la gomma lacca. Però diciamo che per quanto riguarda la ricerca siamo andati spesso in biblioteca, abbiamo veramente ricercato perché non si trovano molte informazioni sui materiali.

GI: Il Plart vi ha fornito informazioni?

AT: All'inizio sì, ci ha messo in contatto con alcuni ricercatori della Sapienza di Roma, però diciamo che ci siamo arrangiati sulla parte di ricerca, loro hanno dato lo spunto iniziale.

GI: Conosceva già Plart prima del progetto?

AT: Noi avevamo incontrato Marco al salone di Milano del 2010. E lui era già curatore lì, quindi ci aveva un po' introdotto Plart. Poi abbiamo guardato il sito e visto le attività, però non conoscevano molto il Plart.

GI: Quali sono le ragioni che vi hanno spinto ad accettare questa commissione?

[0:10:00][0:10:00]

AT: Innanzi tutto era una commissione, quindi c'erano dei soldi disponibili, una ragione economica. Poi c'era anche una ragione di interesse, all'inizio eravamo un po' sorpresi dalla chiamata, poi dopo una settimana di ricerca avevamo capito che c'erano degli interessi sul tema.

Poi all'inizio era nata come una collaborazione tra noi, il Plart e Lia Rumma. Lia Rumma e' un personaggio importante in Italia. poi doveva essere presentato a Milano che e' un altro layer importante. Quindi le ragioni erano tematica, economica e persone coinvolte nel progetto.

[0:10:30][0:10:30]

GI: Hai citato la presentazione di Milano come uno dei fattori che ha giocato a favore della commissione. Ecco, quale e' stato il ruolo di Rossana Orlandi? Ha influito sul progetto questo contesto?

[0:12:00][0:12:00]

AT: Si, assolutamente si. Ha influito perche' ad un certo punto del progetto Lia Rumma e' uscita dal progetto, quindi per noi, la nostra galleria in Italia e' Rossana quindi abbiamo coinvolto lei. Lei era interessata, e per noi Rossana soprattutto durante il Salone del Mobile di Milano era ed e' importante a livello di visibilita', perche' da li' passano persone interessanti, hai una buona visibilita'. Per noi e' stato importante essere li', sia per il progetto perche' ha avuto molta visibilita'. Infatti all'inizio con Marco prima di coinvolgere Rossana, si pensava di andare o da Lia Rumma nella sua galleria o alla Fabbrica del Vapore. Noi siamo sempre stati scettici rispetto a questa opzione perche' soprattutto a Milano durante il Salone e' sempre difficile canalizzare le persone in un punto e se non sei nel posto giusto il progetto o non viene visto o non e' valorizzato. Diciamo che da Rossana, noi non siamo contentissimi dell spazio dove abbiamo presentato, perche' era nel basement, e alla fine comunque siamo riusciti a ricreare un ambiente ideale per il progetto. Pero' il progetto avrebbe avuto bisogno di piu' aria, uno spazio un po' piu' grande. Pero' quando lavori sul salone devi sempre lavorare con queste restrizioni.

GI: Ora nelle presentazioni successivi riuscite a presentarlo come volete?

[0:14:00]

AT: Sai dipende. Perche' la maggior parte delle esibizioni di Botanica successive erano o in mostre tematiche, quindi non erano personali non era una personale su Botanica, quindi a volte mandai 2-3 pezzi e non mandai mai piu' l'installazione, e' stata presentata solo una volta interamente al Plart, per il resto solo alcuni pezzi qua e la'. Ovviamente quando il progetto non e' piu' nelle tue mani, quando non lo presenti piu' tu indipendentemente sta alle persone che prendono il progetto in mano, che prendono la palla in mano.

GI: E a livello amministrativo la logistica di Botanica e' ancora a vostro carico? Che grado di controllo avete sui pezzi?

[0:14:46]

AT: Sai sui pezzi in generale abbiamo il massimo controllo perche' li produciamo noi e sappiamo dove vanno. Tranne nel caso in cui vengono venduti, se son venduti a privati non so cosa ne fanno. Pero' di solito controlliamo noi. Per esempio i primi prototipi che abbiamo prodotto appartengono al Plart.

[0:15:12]

Pero' la maggior parte delle esibizioni in cui i pezzi di Botanica sono coinvolti li abbiamo trovati noi, quindi comunque controlliamo spesso noi. Sa lo studio non e' cosi' grande che perdi il controllo delle cose.

GI: E' un lavoro prendersi cura della logistica?

[0:15:40]

AT: Si. Un incubo, e' la roba che mi piace meno. E' sempre bello quando lo fai la prima volta, poi quando devi riprodurli di nuovo, soprattutto per esibizioni, quindi non sono pezzi che vanno a clienti... ovviamente e' uno strumento importante. E' un po' come quando una pop star fa un tour, e' ovvio avere tanti pezzi per farli girare, pero' e' tanto lavoro.

[0:16:00]

Stiamo vedendo sempre di piu' che riusciamo almeno a farci pagare le spese dei progetti. Anzi una delle clausole che ora mettiamo: se non abbiamo le spese coperte – e non ti parlo di spedizione quelle le vogliamo sempre – anche di produzione, noi non facciamo piu' mostre". Perche' se no ti trovi sempre ad avere un sacco di spese non coperte.

GI: Poi i pezzi ritornano?

AT: Sì. Dipende. Se sono negozi o gallerie che li acquisiscono, magari pagano una parte.

GI: Quindi ogni pezzo ha una sua economia?

[0:17:15] [0:17:15]

AT: Sì. Ci sono mostre che sono solo mostre, per cui i pezzi vengono esibiti e poi tornano al mittente. Altri invece sono mostre in gallerie dove i pezzi possono essere venduti. Dipende.

GI: Riguardo lo spazio Rossana Orlandi. Voi quest'anno ci siete ritornati con il progetto per Booo...

AT: Sì diciamo che quest'anno è stato molto limitato al Salone.

GI: Ma il contatto con la Orlandi anche in questo caso arriva da voi?

[0:18:00]

AT: No, il direttore di Booo e l'assistente di Rossana, quindi è un contatto suo.

GI: Avete beneficiato della visibilità di Botanica?

AT: Sì assolutamente.

GI: In che modo?

[0:18:48] [0:18:48]

AT: In tutti i modi. Quando facciamo questo genere di progetti, sono progetti anche che non hanno una valenza commerciale, cioè abbiamo venduto pezzi, che però nascono e muoiono all'interno della commissione. Poi ovviamente potremmo portarli noi avanti nella parte del materiale, però a volte non ci interessa nemmeno. Ovviamente quando fai un genere di esibizione così, vuoi la visibilità per il progetto, ma ti porta poi a... Un progetto così ci ha portato altre commissioni...

GI: Direttamente?

AT: Sì, sì. Assolutamente sì. Ma non legato a Botanica, non rifaremo Botanica per qualcun altro, però ci ha dato la visibilità e la possibilità di lavorare con altra gente.

GI: Credi che le aspettative dei nuovi committenti siano molto legate a Botanica?

[0:20:00]

AT: Sì. Magari non a Botanica in sé, ma all'insieme di lavori che stiamo producendo.

GI: Quindi i committenti riescono a leggere oltre il progetto?

AT: Sì.

GI: Il magazine, la rivista di design è uno dei pochi posti dove l'aspetto più culturale del design incontra quello industriale, anche l'impaginazione lo conferma... Le nuove commissioni su che ambiente sono?

[0:20:58]

AT: La roba buona che ci sta capitando è che ci stanno capitando commissioni da enti tipo Plart... per esempio ora stiamo facendo un progetto per Vitra Design Museum, è perfetto. E per Fendi, ma non la parte commerciale, piuttosto la parte culturale, è un ente tipo il Plart. Non è un'associazione, ma comunque non è un prodotto che deve essere venduto. E questa è la roba che ci piace, che alcune ditte stanno vedendo qualcosa in là nei progetti che stiamo facendo e quindi anche nella parte industriale.

GI: Riuscite ad avere un dialogo con l'industria?

AT: Stiamo cominciando. Bisogna vedere se riusciamo ad avercelo questo dialogo. Però stiamo cominciando.

GI: Seconda te cosa attrae l'industria?

[0:22:00]

AT: Le ditte con cui stiamo iniziando a collaborare, vedono un'attitudine o un tipo di ricerca che gli interessa e gli piace. Secondo me questo è interessante, siamo passati 10-15 anni in cui le aziende non sperimentavano moltissimo, però adesso ci sono una serie di aziende. Per esempio con la luce ora ci sono un sacco di innovazioni date dai LED, dagli OLED, quindi c'è bisogno di sperimentare e di creare un nuovo linguaggio. Stessa cosa con l'industria del furniture quindi nuovi materiali. Per esempio l'anno scorso io sono rimasto scioccato, è stato il primo anno che è stata presentata una sedia biodegradabile. Se tu pensi che questo è successo nel 2011 è un po' da dementi, se pensi che prima del 2011 le ditte non abbiano pensato a fare una sedia biodegradabile. Quindi adesso le ditte stanno cominciando a sperimentare un sacco con il materiale. Secondo me c'è una sorta di re-interesse nella sperimentazione. Le ditte con cui abbiamo il contatto, sono ditte che osano, sono abbastanza classiche ma che sperimentano.

[0:24:00]

Quando vedono i nostri lavori non credo che gli interessi la parte concettuale, di concept, di storia, ma sono più attratti dalla ricerca materiale, un tipo di ricerca che loro capiscono, quella più materiale o tecnica.

GI: Qual'era secondo voi il valore forte di botanica, quello tecnico o quello culturale?

AT: Sono legati insieme. Quando fai un progetto come Botanica è ovvio che c'è una ricerca di tipo materiale, però noi quando facciamo i progetti non ci fermiamo mai alla parte tecnica a noi non piace. Ci sono un sacco di designer che lo fanno e va benissimo così, loro scoprono, inventano, fanno una ricerca sul materiale, fanno una forma X e quello è il progetto, a loro non interessa indagare il resto. A noi questo non basta, ci piace andare oltre, l'oggetto cosa ti evoca, cosa significa fare l'oggetto in uno specifico momento storico. Fare una determinata ricerca in un determinato periodo storico. Quindi secondo me si vanno a intrecciare inevitabilmente le due cose, la ricerca materiale e quella concettuale.

[0:26:00]

GI: In Botanica è difficile capire se il traino è tecnico, concettuale o estetico.

AT: Sì, è tipico del nostro lavoro di strafilare. Se a te interessa la parte materiale dici "che bei materiali o che brutti materiali", poi magari vai a scoprire che c'è un motivo per cui noi abbiamo fatto quel determinato oggetto o ricerca, oppure se a uno non interessa né la parte materiale né quella concettuale magari apprezza la parte estetica. Quando secondo me ci sono un sacco di progetti – ora non me ne viene in mente neanche uno – in cui la gente mostra la ricerca materiale e basta "questo è il materiale che ho scoperto o che ho inventato", che va benissimo però non è quell'occhio che facciamo noi di solito.

GI: Credi che Botanica come installazione avesse tutti questi layer?

AT: Sì anche se non siamo contenti di come abbiamo fatto l'installazione in generale.

GI: Non è mai stata replicata quella con i campioni dei materiali e le illustrazioni?

AT: In piccolo al Plart. A volte per esempio ne faremo una a Gant e abbiamo mandato un piccolo set di sample, due tre vasi e un quadretto. Si cerca sempre di ricreare una micro-installazione, però funziona molto di più con Autarky.

[0:28:00]

Quella era stata pensata come un'installazione, mentre Botanica è una via di mezzo. Secondo me l'abbiamo troppo elaborata, troppo comunicata. L'anno scorso da Rossana avevamo un tavolo con tutti quanti i sample, le piante... e quello secondo me dovevamo evitarlo. È stato un layer non necessario secondo me. Mentre in Autarky è proprio nell'immagine del progetto che è in quel modo, è quasi uno scatto che hai i mobili in un determinato modo, che comunicano cose diverse, mentre in Botanica le varie parti erano meno organiche, oggetti e installazione.

GI: Ricordi qualche media report che giudichi di particolare valore?

[0:29:15] [0:29:15]

AT: Botanica ha avuto un sacco di interesse dalla stampa, quello era buono. Ci sono stati alcuni begli articoli, tra cui quello di Alice Rawsthorne, Arte Review ha fatto un bell'articolo che non era specificatamente su Botanica, ma ne parlava molto. Su Icon... ne sono usciti molti, anche su Domus Paola ha scritto due begli articoli su Botanica.

[0:30:00]

GI: Cosa apprezzi di un articolo?

AT: Quando non si copia incolla la press-release. Per esempio la nostra comunicazione e' molto precisa. Ci piace quando i giornalisti copiano-incollano, perche' riusciamo a veicolare quello che vogliamo dire noi. Quello e' ottimo. Pero' e' ovvio che quando fai un articolo che non e' mera descrizione del progetto, e' bello se c'e' un po' di critica sul progetto positiva o negativa che sia. Secondo me e' molto difficile trovare critica nel design, pochissimi giornali fanno critica sul design. La maggior parte dei giornali e' un report su quello che accade, copia-incolla di press release e basta, e' difficile che ci sia

GI: Dezeen e' un po' l'emblema di questo.

AT: Si pero' su Dezeen in ogni caso viene fatta un minimo di selezione. C'e' comunque un taglio editoriale. Pero' sto vedendo che su Dezeen ultimamente – ho parlato da poco con Marcus – loro sono molto interessati anche alla parte di interviste. Stanno facendo un sacco di interviste, mi sa che faranno un libro solo sulle interviste che stanno facendo. Quindi secondo me anche la' sta un po' cambiando.

[0:32:00]

Su Designboom e' invece piu' come dici tu, e' molto piu' didascalico, e' semplicemente un contenitore di notizie sul design. Che va benissimo.

GI: E invece di media report che vi hanno deluso?

AT: No. Ma sai perche' il mondo del design e' molto diverso da quello dell'arte. Nel mondo dell'arte c'e' molta piu' critica positiva e negativa, nel mondo del design non ce'. E' difficile leggere degli articoli negativi, magari c'e' piu' un parlare negativo tra di noi, ma poi ufficialmente non c'e' mai delusione sulla carta, magari sui commenti ecco allora diciamo che la parte negativa avviene sui commenti nei blog pero'

FRIDAY, 27TH MARCH 2012 - FONDAZIONE PLART (NAPLES)

# Transcript Marco Petroni (Plart)

■ visibility

■ autonomy

■ reputation

■ financial value

■ personal reward

Marco Petroni: Sono Marco Petroni, direttore culturale della fondazione Plart. All'interno della fondazione mi occupo della definizione delle linee progettuali e culturali. La fondazione Plart si occupa prevalentemente della trasmissione e valorizzazione della cultura legata al mondo dei polimeri.

[0:04:00]

Giovanni Innella: In merito al progetto botanica qual'è stato il tuo ruolo?

MP: Rispetto al progetto botanica, il mio ruolo è stato abbastanza ampio e lungo nel senso che con Forma Fantasma c'era stato un primo scambio culturale sulla presentazione di Autarky che è il loro progetto precedente. Da lì è nata l'idea di provare a realizzare un progetto che avesse come punto di partenza la specificità della fondazione. Ovvero questa referenza molto forte al mondo dei polimeri. All'interno del progetto, il mio ruolo è stato di curare complessivamente non soltanto gli aspetti progettuali e di lettura del progetto, ma anche di mediatore tra il committente che in questo caso è il presidente della fondazione Maria Pia Incutti e i designer. Anche per ragioni logistiche questo è stato un ruolo e una parte della mia partecipazione al progetto molto importante, perché c'è stata una committenza a tutto tondo, quindi anche delle definizioni giuridiche del rapporto. Poi nello specifico rispetto alla presentazione milanese ho curato l'aspetto di presentazione ai contenuti culturali e critici del progetto.

[0:06:00]

GI: Sei stato tu a introdurre Forma Fantasma all'interno di Plart?

MP: Sì, diciamo che questo è il mio ruolo all'interno della fondazione. Io ho avuto un incarico da parte del presidente di legare alla valorizzazione e promozione della collezione storica di plastiche storiche, un'attenzione alla contemporaneità e il mio ruolo è esattamente quello di sottoporre al presidente e alla fondazione, degli interpreti del design contemporaneo che possano incarnare e documentare le dinamiche culturali della contemporaneità, in particolare nell'ambito del design, ma non solo.

GI: La tua presenza occorre all'inizio della commissione e prosegue fino alla fine. Credi che questo rapporto prolungato tra committente e designer sia tipico del design contemporaneo?

MP: Credo proprio di no. Dalle mie informazioni e conoscenza diretta so che esiste una frammentazione dei ruoli. La fortuna che io ho all'interno della fondazione è quella di avere carta bianca, ma allo stesso tempo la responsabilità di seguire vari aspetti dei progetti e delle commissioni che portiamo avanti.

[0:08:00]

Io lavoro da tre anni all'interno della fondazione, e questo sta diventando l'aspetto più importante perché mi permette di conoscere ed indagare vari ambiti del rapporto tra committente e designer, ma in maniera più ampia anche di conoscere aspetti culturali che vanno dalle relazioni con l'ufficio stampa, comunicazione alla grafica, piuttosto che alle dinamiche di allestimento. Quindi una complessità di costruzione e di competenze che in qualche modo sto assorbendo e sto valorizzando.

GI: La dimensione della fondazione, gioca un ruolo nella relazione con il designer rispetto a realtà più commerciali?

MP: In realtà dobbiamo separare i due ambiti. Noi nel commissionare Forma Fantasma abbiamo completamente trascurato, se non omissis le prospettive commerciali di questo progetto. Ci siamo preoccupati della forza e del messaggio culturale che era insito nel progetto. Bisogna separare una committenza culturale da una committenza industriale.



[0:10:00]

Anche perché se volessimo inserire in una dinamica industriale un progetto come Botanica faremmo molta fatica a trovare degli aspetti di aggancio ad una realtà industriale, anche piccola. Credo che questo sia uno dei punti di forza dell'approccio progettuale di Forma Fantasma. Loro stessi non solo nel caso di Botanica, ma in tutti i loro progetti, trascurano questo aspetto e provano a immaginare dei mondi alternativi. Nel caso di Autarky è assolutamente dichiarato già nel concept di progetto: viene immaginata una società sotto embargo e i progettisti sono chiamati a declinare un materiale in degli oggetti che possano far sopravvivere questa società'.

GI: C'è un valore di Botanica per l'industria? Pensi che l'industria sia in grado di cogliere quel valore? Come?

MP: Ripeto. A mio avviso non c'è una referenza con il mondo industriale. C'è una referenza molto forte come stimolazione e provocazione rispetto a delle modalità industriali. Nel senso che il progetto Botanica è una riflessione su un mondo contemporaneo che in qualche modo abbandona il petrolio e riporta l'orologio

[0:12:00]

del tempo all'indietro, ovvero ad un'epoca pre-petrolio. In questo concept progettuale c'è una grande forza: fermiamo tutto e proviamo a capire se nel corso del nostro tempo accelerato non ci siamo dimenticati di alcune cose che forse possono avere una validità anche nell'oggi. Infatti non a caso io parlo di design della sopravvivenza. Tu, nel visitare il museo dicevi: "questi oggetti sono appartenuti alla mia esistenza, ma io non li ho mai osservati come oggetti di valore". Ecco, secondo me la sopravvivenza è esattamente questo. Cioè, noi abbiamo uno stile di vita e un approccio di conoscenza che tende a consumare in fretta qualunque cosa, ma ci sono degli oggetti che in qualche modo nella loro semplicità hanno una forza, che è quella di poterci far riflettere. Botanica è questo dispositivo concettuale e progettuale. Ritornando alla tua domanda rispetto alla committenza industriale, a mio avviso l'industria adesso si trova di fronte a molte possibilità anche di sguardo all'indietro. Non è un caso che il nostro è il tempo del vintage.

[0:14:00]

Riflettiamoci. Il mondo dei media in questo ha grandi responsabilità. Quando noi osserviamo i trend del vintage, dal retro, questo non è altro che il sistema che Forma Fantasma ci mette di fronte con il loro progetto. Ovvero c'è un tempo e quel tempo ha un valore nella misura in cui riesce a trasmetterci conoscenza e questa conoscenza deve diventare anche patrimonio dell'industria. Non dimentichiamoci che Forma Fantasma operano all'estero, ma sono profondamente italiani e lo sono anche con i loro messaggi. La fortuna del design italiano degli anni 50-70, per intenderci il design del mobile dell'area brianzola, era un rapporto alchemico tra imprenditore illuminato e architetti che non erano ancora designer, ma diventano designer perché stimolati dall'industria. Questo è importante nella storia del design italiano. Noi spesso lo trascuriamo questo aspetto, ma Castiglioni era un architetto. Se guardiamo al suo metodo, anche lì ritroviamo il sistema della sopravvivenza, un sopravvivenza ironica. La lampada Arco non è altro che una umile canna da pesca che viene traslata e diventa un oggetto che ha una funzionalità ed una bellezza estetica forse unica e insuperata.

GI: Potresti citare altri attori coinvolti nel progetto?

[0:16:00] [0:16:00]

MP: Il progetto sicuramente ha una compartecipazione molto forte da parte dello spazio Rossana Orlandi. Uno spazio che durante il Salone del mobile è forse lo spazio più visitato. Quindi uno degli elementi che ci hanno fatto anche appassionare al progetto è stato quello di avere la possibilità di esibirlo all'interno dello spazio di Rossana Orlandi. Rossana Orlandi è stata sicuramente un partner importante del network, ma questo è un network che si è generato in progress. Dopo la presentazione di Botanica ha generato un'esplosione degli attori interessati e coinvolti nel progetto. Per esempio non possiamo dimenticare Paola Antonelli, che vedendo il progetto si è appassionata a tal punto da richiederci la possibilità di inserire uno degli elementi della collezione nella collezione permanente del MoMA per esempio. Anche l'Art Institute di Chicago anche ha acquisito un pezzo. E' un network che si va facendo, ora non si può prescindere dalla visibilità che il progetto ha avuto per ben due volte su Domus. Anche questo va considerato: Domus che ritorna per ben due volte su un progetto vuol dire

che questo progetto ha determinato una riflessione forte e forse anche degli effetti di network che nella loro forza d'urto determinano un'attenzione da parte dei media. Anche Libby Sellers si è appassionata.

[0:18:00]

GI: In che modo si genera il network e cosa aggiunge al progetto?

MP: Al progetto di per se' non aggiungono molto. Nel senso che il merito del progetto va dato al committente e ai designer in prima persona. Esiste una fase successiva del progetto. Un buon progetto non può che incontrare un buon network. Il network si determina in progress. Se il progetto ha funzionato vuol dire che ha una validità e genera un network. Viceversa non è un buon network che determina un buon progetto. Abbiamo assistito a mille fallimenti in questo senso: forze d'urto potentissime che poi alla fine di fronte alla fragilità del progetto sono crollate. Penso a molti progetti di Cappellini per esempio. Cappellini sembrava dovesse mangiarsi il mondo sia in termini economici che culturali e di fatto questo non è avvenuto perché sappiamo bene che se il gruppo SHARM non rivelava un fondo d'investimento che rilevava Cappellini sarebbe stato in profonda crisi. Perché ha investito tutte le sue energie anche economiche su questa costruzione del network e di fatto i progetti non avevano una forza reale.

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Invece, rimanendo in ambito cappellini, dei buoni progetti come quelli di Kuramata, vivono ancora e danno ancora linfa a quel marchio nonostante non avessero all'epoca questa forza d'urto del network.

GI: Qual'è il valore del network di un designer?

[0:20:50]

MP: Forma Fantasma ha un appeal fortissimo sul mondo del progetto. Loro stessi portano un valore aggiunto che è dato dal fatto di aver realizzato delle cose con un allure eccezionale sia in termini sia di immagine che culturali. Formafantasma hanno la capacità di provocare, ma lo sanno fare con una sensibilità e un modo tutto italiano – che io riconosco – che è forse la loro carta vincente. Loro anche visivamente come coppia hanno un allure che funziona molto nel mondo del design. FormaFantasma sono una macchina da guerra corazzata da molti punti di vista nonostante la giovane età.

[0:22:00]

Io non so quanto questo sia spontaneo o sia costruito, io sento una grande spontaneità nei loro progetti. È come se loro avessero l'urgenza di fare in quel momento esattamente quella cosa. Penso a Moulding Tradition per esempio. Questo collegamento quasi inconsapevole con il fenomeno degli sbarchi, oppure a Colony c'è la stessa dimensione. Nel periodo in cui presentavano Colony esplodeva la primavera araba in Libia. Questo mi fa pensare che inconsapevolmente, ma anche consapevolmente incarnano esattamente quello che il designer contemporaneo deve essere. Ovvero non più un creatore di forme o un realizzatore di bei progetti, ma in qualche modo il designer contemporaneo deve essere l'interprete del mondo che lo circonda e rendere quotidiana questa lettura. Questo è il ruolo del designer contemporaneo, e non è un caso che chi riesce a diventare interprete del proprio tempo incontra anche i favori del mercato, dei media e quant'altro.

GI: Tornando alla cronologia della commissione, in che modo hai conosciuto Forma Fantasma?

[0:23:50]

MP: Io Simone e Andrea li ho conosciuti anche grazie a te perché avevo visto il loro progetto per Droog e avevo iniziato a leggere le premesse di Autarky. Poi sono andato a conoscerli in occasione della presentazione di Autarky e da lì è nato uno scambio di corrispondenza e ad un certo punto, sollecitato da Maria Pia, è nata l'idea di proporre loro un progetto. Quindi la durata di sviluppo del progetto è circa un anno. Dalla commissione fino alla definizione del progetto con vari step nel mezzo sia informativi che concreti. Ti do un dato che può essere significativo: il contratto lo abbiamo stipulato a Gennaio 2011. Quindi a 3 mesi dalla realizzazione. Anche questo è un aspetto bello di questa collaborazione ovvero che c'è stata tutta una sorta di genesi del progetto condivisa anche umanamente a prescindere dal risultato. Ad un certo punto il risultato del progetto era secondario a quello che era interessante ovvero la relazione di scambi.

[0:26:00]

GI: Il brief e' stato definito a priori, imposto o adattato a Forma Fantasma?

MP: Il tema del progetto che la Fondazione ha dato a Forma Fantasma e' molto ampio. Noi l'unica cosa che abbiamo chiesto a Forma Fantasma e' stata quella di disegnare, immaginare una collezione che fosse il loro personale omaggio al mondo delle plastiche. Questo e' stato il tema ampio, largo e complesso dato a Formafantasma.

[0:26:30]

GI: Quanta autonomia e' stata accordata ai designer?

MP: Loro avevano autonomia assoluta, noi abbia visto solo 20 giorni prima il risultato. Ma eravamo convinti che fosse un risultato ottimo. E' chiaro che i messaggi sulla direzione del progetto li abbiamo sempre avuti.

GI: Come si tiene una comunicazione con i designer senza parlare dell'outcome finale?

[0:28:00]

MP: Loro sono stati molto efficaci nel darci fiducia. Nel senso che tutte le idee che poi si sono canalizzate nella collezione, loro ce l'hanno trasmesse attraverso immagini, riflessioni, pensieri. Questo ci dava fiducia che stessero seguendo una strada e che sapessero controllarla. Loro sono partiti da questa immagine molto forte di questo uomo della foresta amazzonica che in canoa attraversa uno specchio d'acqua che e' sommerso dalla plastica.

Questa e' stata l'immagine di partenza. Quando abbiamo ricevuto quell'immagine li' abbiamo capito che la strada era tracciata. Il secondo step sono state delle immagini del mondo botanico. Sempre legato all'amazzonia, ma in questo caso la forza delle piante di poter produrre e rilasciare caucciù e le gomme naturali. A quel punto già si capiva che la direzione almeno dal punto di vista dell'approccio culturale era giusta.

GI: Dell'artefatto non ne avete parlato? Loro avrebbero potuto proporre un automobile, un vaso... qualsiasi cosa?

MP: Sì! Ad un certo punto loro volevano realizzare delle seggiole, per esempio. Ci hanno anche provato, ma non li convinceva come produzione. Però alla fine oltre a vasi e ciotole hanno realizzato anche la lampada per esempio. A milano avevano anche presentato questo contenitore che poi hanno eliminato dalla collezione perché non li convinceva dal punto di vista dell'uso, della realizzazione e quant'altro. C'è stata anche una sperimentazione di tipologia di prodotto che poi sono state eliminate dalla collezione.

[0:30:00]

GI: Cosa e' successo ai pezzi dopo la presentazione.

MP: Allora, c'è stata una prima produzione e quelli sono di proprietà della fondazione, parte sono qui e molti stanno girando in varie mostre. L'accordo con Formafantasma prevedeva che la prima edizione sarebbe stata della Fondazione la quale diventava proprietaria del progetto e della prima produzione.

[0:30:38] [0:30:38]

Uno degli aspetti che conferma che non ci sia stata rigidità nel rapporto sta nel fatto che Forma Fantasma sono liberissimi di riprodurre, esporre la collezione dove vogliono con l'unica condizione di riconoscere che il progetto e' una commissione della fondazione Plart.

[0:31:15]

GI: C'è un accordo sui credit?

MP: Sì. Anche se l'accordo non e' molto rigido. Semplicemente il riconoscimento. Anche perché la nostra necessità e' anche quella di utilizzare la circolazione di botanica e forma fantasma per veicolare il nome della fondazione.

[0:31:55]

GI: Che cosa ha ricevuto il Plart da Forma Fantasma?

MP: Il Plart ha ricevuto molto da Botanica. Soprattutto il riconoscimento sul piano internazionale della bontà di una ricerca culturale. Ha ricevuto molto. Un progetto molto importante per la collezione. Questa percezione l'avevamo avuta con Autarky. Sebbene fosse un progetto

derivato, già presentato a Milano, quando abbiamo presentato Autarky a Napoli abbiamo notato sia un interesse in ambito locale, ma anche più ampio. E' stato uno dei motivi per cui abbiamo scelto Forma Fantasma nel portare avanti un progetto come questo. Botanica e' stata un'opportunità per capire che quell'esperimento lì può diventare un modus operandi per la fondazione. Ovvero, individuato il designer non esponiamo oggetti già prodotti ma gli chiediamo di realizzare un progetto ad hoc. Quindi abbiamo scelto in maniera molto convinta di fare meno mostre, ma più progetti.

[0:34:00] [0:34:00]

GI: Cosa offrite ai designer in senso ampio.

MP: Ai designer e' data la possibilità di realizzare un progetto, tra l'altro da una fondazione culturale che inizia ad affermarsi dopo 4 anni. In più gli diamo la possibilità di sperimentare su un tema abbastanza ambiguo come quello della plastica. Inoltre c'è la massima libertà nella realizzazione del progetto, salvo la referenza diretta o indiretta al mondo dei polimeri.

GI: Prima hai citato la circolazione degli artefatti, cosa vuol dire questo per il Plart?

[0:36:00]

MP: Esco un attimo dalla domanda per fornirti un ulteriore dato. Quando noi abbiamo concluso l'accordo con Forma Fantasma, loro non avevano ancora idea di cosa avrebbero presentato al salone, cioè non avevano altra occasione di presentazione di loro progetti se non una piccola cosa da Dilmos, che poi credo che in termini di riscontro a loro abbia dato ben poco. Forma Fantasma col progetto Botanica hanno fatto una dichiarazione di maturità. Questo e' evidente.

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GI: Il Plart nello specifico ha avuto l'intuizione di capire che loro erano in un momento di snodo non solo creativo, ma anche d'immagine, di presentazione e di riflessione. Allora avendo intuito questo, il risultato poteva essere o un enorme flop o un'esplosione.

[0:37:15] [0:37:15]

MP: In quel modo riuscivi a coprire a 360° i vari ambiti nei quali Forma Fantasma sta avendo i suoi riscontri, ovvero musei, gallerie, media, dalle riviste ai blog e in più un'evidenza di persone capaci di fare. Non e' un caso che Forma Fantasma in questo momento vengano chiamati in contesti come workshop, lectures e quant'altro. Botanica li ha affermati al mondo del progetto, degli opinion leader, insomma tutta quella complessità di relazioni che il sistema del design mette in moto come un gruppo maturo, capace di poter stare nel mondo del nuovo design. A mio avviso il saggio di Richard Sannet "l'uomo artigiano" fotografa esattamente quello che e' il ruolo del designer nel nostro contesto. Cioe' una consapevolezza della tecnologia, una grande sapienza artigiana e artigianale, grande conoscenza del contesto culturale nel quale si va a riferire e l'industria non come referente naturale, ma come una delle possibilità.

[0:39:32] [0:39:32]

Forma Fantasma in questo senso sono degli interpreti abbastanza consapevoli, accompagnare a tutto questo sistema che Formafantasma con un progetto maturo, hanno messo in moto il nome della fondazione Plart e' stata un'operazione riuscita a 360°. Banalmente Botanica ha fatto conoscere questo Marchio come committente di un progetto importante.

GI: Come il Plart ha beneficiato del network generato dal progetto e di cui adesso fa parte? O rimane solo un potenziale?

MP: Noi come fondazione scontiamo anche un po' l'essere periferici rispetto al network, però questo ha anche dei vantaggi. La struttura della fondazione e' molto snella, molto veloce, si prendono decisioni in maniera rapida, non si torna indietro sulle decisioni e si portano avanti i progetti. Farlo a Napoli ha un senso perché ti permette di essere sganciato dalla pressione milanese. A Milano sarebbe molto complicato portare avanti una linea culturale come quella della Fondazione. Allo stesso tempo scontiamo una perifericità, ma anche una diffidenza del sistema, il Plart e' giovane, ha 4 anni, però 2-3 cose le abbiamo fatte in questi 4 anni. Penso alla sezione multimediale, a varie mostre, ai progetti con Mischer-Traxler, c'è un dinamismo culturale derivato dalla scelta di Napoli come laboratorio dove poter fare delle cose per poi presentarsi su ribalte un po' più pressanti dal punto di vista del giudizio e operatività.

GI: Qual'è la differenza della comunicazione e portata tra mondo del design e mondo dell'arte?

MP: Bisogna chiarire che sono ambiti completamente differenti. Il sistema dell'arte è abbastanza consolidato dove si sa che esiste il museo, il critico, il curatore, il gallerista, etc... Il sistema del design è un sistema in via di definizione, ma anche come statuto disciplinare quello del design è in movimento, forse molto più di quello dell'arte contemporanea. Per quanto riguarda lo specifico della comunicazione hanno modalità completamente diverse. Il mondo dell'arte contemporanea deve far passare in termini comunicativi un'esperienza, per comunicare un progetto di arte contemporanea ci si concentra molto sul messaggio curatoriale dell'operazione. Nel caso del design questo aspetto è molto sfumato, perché il ruolo del curatore nell'ambito del design è ancora molto ambiguo e promiscuo. A volte sono i designer stessi che sono curatori, soprattutto in Italia questo ruolo è molto sfumato. È un ruolo in via di definizione. Per esempio adesso Flash Art mi ha chiesto di provare a fotografare qual'è la figura e il ruolo del curatore di design, e devo dire che ho avuto grosse difficoltà nel definirlo. Perché effettivamente la comunicazione legata al design o ha come riferimento il bell'oggetto e presentandolo si attiva eventualmente il percorso critico.

[0:45:04] [0:45:04]

Ma spesso le mostre curate nell'ambito del design, lavorano su una sommatoria di nomi e questo lo trovo abbastanza deprimente. Il design a mio avviso, e questo è il ruolo di noi curatori, dovrebbe partecipare al dinamismo culturale della contemporaneità attraverso la scoperta e non l'affermazione. Documentare il dinamismo del design contemporaneo attraverso nuove scene, nuovi modi che poi sono quelle che allargano i confini di quest'ambito che a volte va a sovrapporsi a quello dell'arte contemporanea, che io non vedo come una cosa negativa. È interessante che ci siano sovrapposizioni di linguaggi perché questo arricchisce le dinamiche culturali e la trasmissione di conoscenza. Qui ritorna il concetto di sopravvivenza. L'arte contemporanea ha la capacità di focalizzare, il design a volte rimane molto sulla superficie soprattutto in Italia. Questo è un aspetto peggiore dettato da strutture di marketing molto invasive, da media che stanno mettendo sempre più nell'angolo gli aspetti critici rispetto al progetto, privilegiando aspetti di tendenza senza un approfondimento. Un curatore, un critico del design devono avere la capacità e la forza di far riflettere su questi temi. La mia esperienza è quella di muovermi agilmente in questo contesto, perché non appartengo né ad un ambito accademico, né ad un'istituzione culturale fortemente riconosciuta o agganciata a dinamiche pubbliche. La fondazione Plart nella sua leggerezza e coerenza culturale mi dà la possibilità di fare questo in un territorio abbastanza vergine dal punto di vista della riflessione sul design. Napoli è la città di Riccardo Dalisi, di Almerigo De Angelis, di Renato De Fusco, ma il tessuto è vergine. Rispetto a altri luoghi in Italia dove spesso ci si muove per bande, per appartenenze.

GI: Questo comporta difficoltà come la mancanza di referenti consolidati?

MP: Napoli storicamente è una città molto attenta alle dinamiche culturali. Infatti negli '70 ha aperto un sistema di gallerie abbastanza diffuso, noto ed evidente sulla scena internazionale. Non dimentichiamo che Lia Rumma da Napoli si è affacciata a Milano ed ora è una delle galleriste più riconosciute al mondo...

GI: Credi che la visibilità del design possa attrarre le attenzioni della pubblica amministrazione?

MP: Sì.

GI: Il progetto Botanica può attrarre l'attenzione della pubblica amministrazione?

MP: Sì. L'appeal del design sui media è uno dei fattori che può chiudere il cerchio. È un fattore che può determinare delle aggregazioni, delle reti. La bontà culturale dell'azione della fondazione Plart viene riconosciuta sul territorio e ciò può attivare un circolo virtuoso nella rete. Noi ci proviamo continuamente ad agganciare realtà accademiche e altro. Perché nel momento in cui si costruisce un sistema diffuso di interessi sul territorio si può determinare una possibilità di trattativa con amministrazioni. Il design su territori come questo che sono stati

contraddistinti da un'industria manifatturiera di piccole dimensioni, non ha mai attecchito fortemente. Però c'è tutto un tessuto di piccole realtà che se messe in rete possono essere anche occasione per i designer di misurarsi. Non dimentichiamoci anche che questo è un territorio a vocazione turistica, quindi mettere in moto dei processi di residenza e di scambi potrebbe essere un ulteriore modo per operare in maniera virtuosa sul territorio. La politica e le amministrazioni non dovrebbero occupare, ma dirigere, occuparsi che il sistema diventi solido. Dovrebbero anche capire che esiste una modalità legata alla progettazione dei servizi che determina innovazione nell'appeal turistica e generale del territorio.

GI: Qual'è il ruolo delle agenzie di pubbliche relazioni nel mondo del design?

MP: Le agenzie di pubbliche relazioni sono una derivazione del mondo della moda dove sono imprendibili. Negli anni '90 il design decide di mutuare quei fenomeni di comunicazione. Il design insegue il mondo del fashion, non a caso ogni anno le aziende sono chiamate a produrre oggetti nuovi. Per promuoversi nella vetrina del salone del mobile, si sceglie anche di affidarsi alle agenzie di pubbliche relazioni. Ma sono i marchi che si affidano alle agenzie di PR, sollecitate dagli uffici di marketing interni. Questo sistema un po' come tutto il sistema del design è entrato in crisi. I media non stanno cogliendo questo cambiamento, nel senso che continuano a perseguire modalità di rappresentazione e non di approfondimento dei progetti, quando invece bisognerebbe stoppare questo meccanismo compulsivo. Ci si dovrebbe fermare per riflettere e questo lo devono fare i critici, ma anche i direttori delle riviste che hanno libertà di azione. Le agenzie di PR non hanno ragion d'essere in un sistema come quello del design. Nel senso che i designer sono capaci di promuovere il loro lavoro ed anche gli uffici marketing interni alle aziende sono sufficienti a promuovere i loro prodotti. È una dispersione di denaro che poi influisce sempre sulla ripartizione dei costi del progetto. Il problema che il progetto determina è 80 per promozione e comunicazione, 10 al designer e 10 su ricerca e sperimentazione. Queste percentuali si stanno sempre più riducendo e aumenta la percentuale del marketing e promozione a discapito della ricerca e progettazione questo è il dato che sta ammazzando il design. Non a caso i marchi italiani sono sempre più estero-fili, non fanno ricerca e non incentivano la ricerca con designer del proprio territorio. Rispetto all'Italia, all'estero forse si sperimenta di più su nuove modalità di stare sul mercato, che non sono posizioni appiattite sul marketing.

# **APPENDIX VIII: ETHICS**

# Ethical Approval Form v6

School of Design, Northumbria University

**Applicant:** Giovanni Innella

**Contact details:** [giovanni.innella@gmail.com](mailto:giovanni.innella@gmail.com) +44 (0) 7908316894

**Programme Leader/Supervisor details:** Paul Rodgers paul.rodgers@northumbria.ac.uk

**Project Title:**  
The Commodity of Trade in the Context of DesignArt

**Date application made:** 24/01/2012

Through completing this form, you *either* indicate that all identified ethical issues can be managed without guidance from DSEC, *or* that DSEC advice is required. If you are unclear about any ethical issue that could arise from your proposed project, you must seek guidance from your Programme Leader (or nominee)/PGR Supervisor/Research Grouping Lead/ DSEC member. You must *not proceed* with any research until required approval has been obtained from your Programme Leader (UGs/PGTs)/Principal Supervisor (PGRs)/DSEC (staff/other research requiring DSEC advice).

**You must complete both Section A and B**, and with this form you must submit all required supporting materials, for example, Informed Consent form(s). For each question in Section A please tick the appropriate box.

## SECTION A.

You *will* complete and submit the School's Standard Informed Consent form, which will make clear to participants their Right to Withdraw, and Confidentiality of information.

		Yes	No	N/A
1	RECRUITING. When recruiting participants known to you could there be concerns over your power relationship that may influence their responses?		X	
2	DECEPTION. Will you deliberately deceive participants, and hide this deception from them?		X	
3	DISTRESS OR DISCOMFORT. Is there any realistic/ conceivable risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort?		X	
4	ANIMALS. Does your research involve animals?		X	

*Only in exceptional circumstances* will you be permitted to use deception in your research. If you have answered **Yes** to Questions 1-4 you must describe how you will address associated ethical issues in SECTION B.



		Yes	No	N/A
5	DEBRIEFING. Will you give participants the opportunity to be debriefed and/or invited to any public presentation of the study and its outcomes/results?	X		
6	INTERNATIONAL. Where data collection or presentation of outcomes occurs outside of the UK, are relevant legal and ethical practices of these other countries understood?	X		

If you have answered **No** to Question 5 or 6 you must describe how you will address associated ethical issues in SECTION B.

7	<p>VULNERABILITY. Do any of your participants fall into any of the following “special” aka “vulnerable” groups?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Children (under the age of 18)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> People who are taking part in your research because they are patients or seeking specific medical treatment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> People who are frail or with communication or learning difficulties (includes “the elderly” and people from overseas for whom English is not their primary language)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> People part in your research because they engage in illegal activities (e.g. under aged drinking or drug taking)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> People undertaking activities that might be seen as provocative or morally unacceptable (e.g. promoting disruptive or anarchic activities)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> People over whom you are in a position of superior power or for whom you have responsibility</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> People whom others could regard as vulnerable or who might feel that they are unable to, freely, give consent</li> </ul>		X	
8	LEGALITY. Might others believe there to be any legal, contentious or sensitive issues involved in this research method or in presentation of the research outcomes?		X	
9	FUNDING. Does the project involve external funders (financial or “in-kind”) or collaboration with others outside the School of Design (e.g. elsewhere in the University or beyond, and, particularly including the NHS), who may wish to direct your research?		X	

If you have answered **Yes** to any of Questions 7-9 you will must describe how you will address associated ethical issues in SECTION B.

*If you have answered **Yes** to Questions 7 or 8, DSEC approval may take longer, especially if proof of UK CRB clearance or similar is required.*

## SECTION B.

List all attachments here, (e.g. questionnaire designs, interview schedules, observation plans)

**All of the following guidance text must be deleted and replaced with information relevant to specific ethical issues. For every ethical issue identified in Section A, you must describe how you will deal with these. Advice on common risk mitigation strategies follow. Please reflect carefully before making direct use of any text below. It is much better to explain risk mitigation in your own words:**

1. **Recruiting:** Potential interviewees will be invited to take part to the research via e-mail. Some of the interviewees are part of the researcher's professional network. However, the relationship between the researcher and the interviewees is a cordial one and it doesn't imply any sort of subordination or hierarchical power so to imply pressure of any sort. In some cases a recommendation letter by mutual acquaintances might be used.
2. **Debriefing:** A copy of the informed consent will be given to the interviewees. Here there are all the needed contact details for the interviewees to interact with the researcher and Northumbria University.
3. **Deception:** This doesn't apply to this specific research project.
4. **Distress or Discomfort:** The interviews consist in a frank, informal conversation of 30/60 minutes, according to the interviews availability. This is unlikely to cause any distress or discomfort.
5. **Animals:** This doesn't apply to this research
6. **International:** The research will be conducted in the EU. As far as the researcher could ascertain by consulting law students, the Countries where the research will be conducted do not have more stringent laws than the UK. The UK legal requirements will be surely met in conducting this research
7. **Vulnerability:** This doesn't apply to this research project
8. **Legality:** As far as the researcher could ascertain, this research project is absolutely legal.
9. **Funding:** This research project requires travels and some basic audio-video recording equipment. If possible, the school should provide the resources to cover travel expenses with EU and the technical equipment for the recordings.

In submitting this form, you accept the obligation upon you to bring to the attention of the DSEC (or nominee) any ethical issues that may not be covered by the above questions.

If ethically relevant circumstances of your research change, you must bring this to the immediate attention of the responsible party (Programme Leader/

Supervisor/ACoP Research Lead/DSEC). For major changes of research plan or implementation, you must submit a new application for ethical approval. If the DSEC becomes aware of any problematic issues associated with your project, approval may be immediately revoked, with conditions imposed that must be met before new approval will be given.

I, the researcher/designer, have fully described in Section B how I will manage all ethical risks highlighted in Section A, and have sought DSEC advice and approval for all significant ethical implications. I will *not proceed* with this project until approval has been obtained from DSEC/Programme Leader (UGs/PGTs)/Principal Supervisor (PGRs).

Signed and dated by the applicant: 24/01/2012

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.

Programme Leader (or nominee)/Supervisor - countersigned and dated to confirm all details above and approval of research:

**For DSEC Use where application requires DSEC advice and approval**

Date application received:

Date response made:

Outcome:

Approved / Approved with Conditions / Referred to UREC / Returned for Revision  
(circle, date, initial & status (PL/Chair DSEC/etc))

**Informed Consent Form for** *Interviews with designers and commissioner*

Researcher: *Giovanni innella*

Phone: +44 (0) 7908316894 email: [Giovanni.innella@gmail.com](mailto:Giovanni.innella@gmail.com)

School of Design: [Mark.Grant@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:Mark.Grant@northumbria.ac.uk) Phone: 0191 227 4193

**About this Research**

*You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Giovanni Innella of Northumbria University. We hope to learn about your perspective on the relationship between design and media and its impact on the design industry. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because we believe you have interesting opinions and information about the topic.*

*If you decide to participate, we will conduct an interview with you, where you would be free to share the information you feel most comfortable divulging. Preferably the interviews should take place in your studio and should last about 30/60 minutes, subject to your availability. It will be audio and video recorded then later transcribed and analyzed. Excerpts of the interviews might be used in the final PhD thesis of Giovanni Innella.*

*At the moment only the verbal transcription will be used for Giovanni Innella's academic research.*

*By signing this Informed Consent Form, you allow any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you to be disclosed in Giovanni Innella's PhD thesis.*

*Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with Northumbria University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time, simply by contacting the researcher Giovanni Innella ([Giovanni.innella@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:Giovanni.innella@northumbria.ac.uk)) or the school administration.*

*The Committee on Ethics at Northumbria University – School of Design, has reviewed and approved the present research.*

*If you have any questions, please ask us. If you have any additional questions later, Dr. Kevin Hilton and I will be happy to answer them. Questions regarding the rights of research subjects may be directed to the Administration of Northumbria University at +44 (0)191 227 4913*

Data obtained through this research will not be used for purposes other than those outlined above *without your separate written consent*.

Participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time within the next 9 months, for any reason, without any need to explain. Where results have not been analysed and published, your data will be destroyed on request.

**By signing, dating, and initialling below, you indicate that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study on this basis.**

I consent to my participation in this study and the use of collected data as described above	Sign: Date:
I consent to this use of any recorded materials, (Photos, Audio, and Video), in research presentations/ research publications/including Internet publications (delete as appropriate).	Initial:

Thank you for consenting to participate in this research  
***Please keep one copy of this form for your own records***

## **APPENDIX IX: TURNITIN EVALUATION**



## Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

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Page count:	296
Word count:	83,589
Character count:	433,643
Submission date:	28-Jan-2014 04:53PM
Submission ID:	28107638

**THE COMMODITY OF TRADE  
IN CONTEMPORARY DESIGN**

GIOVANNI INNELLA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of Northumbria  
University at Newcastle for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

February 2014

## Thesis final

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